

MITSOU

**Uniform Edition of Works by
COLETTE**

X

Already published in this edition:

I

CHÉRI *and* THE LAST OF CHÉRI

II

CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

III

JULIE DE CARNEILHAN *and* CHANCE
ACQUAINTANCES

IV

MY MOTHER'S HOUSE *and* SIDO

V

GIGI *and* THE CAT

VI

THE VAGABOND

VII

RIPENING SEED

VIII

CLAUDINE AT SCHOOL

IX

MY APPRENTICESHIPS *and* MUSIC-HALL
SIDELIGHTS

Colette

MITSOÛ

THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG WOMEN

translated by

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DATE: May, during the first Great War. The "Empyrée" in Montmartre is putting on its great Springtime Revue, *Hips and Haws*, and for that it has taken on eighteen young women, one young compère guaranteed unfit "through chest trouble", and a tragedy-actor aged eighty, for the indispensable parts of "Old Man Victory", "A Soldier of Napoleon" and "Marshal Joffre".

The dressing-room of Miss Mitsou, the star. Wall-paper: an imitation pink-and-white *toile de Jouy*; that is, when it *was* pink and white. Mitsou never knew those days. A sort of trestle for a table, covered with face-towels. Wash-stand, a maid's basin and jug. Face-powder in cardboard containers. A ring, with a very fine diamond, in among the eyebrow pencils and boxes of rouge. A small divan about as soft as a park bench; two cane chairs, painted. A general air of "that'll do, anyway".

Time: The interval. Mitsou is resting, alone. She is wearing strawberry coloured stockings sewn on to her tights by the tops, a pair of gilt shoes and a mauve crepon kimono. Nature has given Mitsou all the advantages that fashion is demanding: very small nose, large eyes as black as her hair, round cheeks, a small, sulky, fresh mouth—that is her face. For the figure what is

required is a slender⁴ body, with long and well-shaped legs, and small and low-slung breasts; well, she has all that with only the small defect of a slight skinniness above the knee. But the thirties will fill up those page-boy's thighs, and also the back that is like an anaemic nymph's; Mitsou is only twenty-four,

Mitsou is alone, sitting at her dressing table. Her legs, opened in a V, are held stiff so as not to strain the stockings, but her young back bends and her neck falls forward, as if she were a thirsty gazelle. Motionless, Mitsou would hardly seem to be alive, if she didn't occasionally powder her cheeks, paint red on her mouth, and pick out the corner of her eye with a pencil. The busy hand is not thinking of anything, nor are the big, dark, shining eyes, nor is the melancholy, peaceful face.

A noise in the corridor, a limping step. A knock on the door by an old, dry hand. Boudou, the call-boy.

BOUDOU (*half-opening the door. He is seventy-two and looks older*): Interval's over. You're on soon, Miss Mitsou.

MITSOU (*coming to, slowly*): Thank you, Boudou. Is your foot better?

BOUDOU: Not much better. If there's no change by Thursday, I'll wash 'um and I'll put on a woollen sock and a cotton sock on top of it. Try anything once; that's my motto.

He goes away, leaving the door half open. A noise of soft shoes in the corridor. In the half-light there passes Beauty, the eighty-year-old actor. He stops for a moment, and the light-bulb in the dressing-room shows up the gorgeous uniform of the Imperial Guard, and also Beauty's blood-shot eyes and his disgusting blubber-lip.

BEAUTY (*to Mitsou*): Everything all right, m'dear?

MITSOU (*hurriedly looking closely into her mirror*): Yes, yes, Mr. Beauty; thank you so much. . . . Oh dear, I am going to be late.

BEAUTY: Would you like me to help you?

MITSOU (*startled*): No, no, Mr. Beauty; don't trouble. . . . What a thing to suggest!

(*He goes out.*)

MITSOU (*shuddering*): I'd rather die than look straight at him. People as old as that shouldn't be allowed about. It isn't really decent. And I'm so sensitive I even can't bear to look when a horse falls down in the street.

A noise in the corridor of ten small wooden heels. The Five Tineliri Girls run by in a very pleasant English rout. Mitsou is blasé and doesn't notice. Then there pass, one after the other, "War Bread", "Paper Shortage", "Saccharine", and the young actor with the weak chest. . . . There enters an Old Lady in wooden shoes, with a decoration on her shabby fur tippet; she is the Dresser.

Finally, a noise, and with it a series of squeaks like a nest of mice disturbed; and into the dressing-room bursts Bit-of-Fluff. Is Bit-of-Fluff plain or pretty? A good figure or not? She is a scrap of woman whose incessant and intentional writhing prevents you making any judgment on things like that. Dyed hair in a cloud comes almost down to her nose, which anyway turns up to meet it. Mascara'd lashes, clown's cheekbones, the corners of her mouth—they all turn up, as if they had been blown by a gust of wind. Her shoulders quiver, her bottom dances, her hands grasp her breasts (to hold them or to call attention to them?) and if her knees rub against each other, is it because Fluff is cold? or is playing for a laugh? or is just knock-kneed? No way of telling. If Fluff were to fall in the Seine, her closest friends couldn't identify her in the morgue. For nobody has ever really seen her.

BIT-OF-FLUFF (*dressed in a grubby dressing-gown and with a symbolical banana in painted cardboard as a hat; she throws herself at Mitson*): Mitsou! Mitsou! Hide them for me. Do. They're going to chuck them out and I'll be fined.

MITSOU (*quietly, eyebrows raised*): Who? They?

FLUFF: The two nice boys there, and they're so good-looking (*pointing to the corridor*). Hide them for me, just until Boudou has finished his round. (*Wheeling, and twisting herself grotesquely.*) They won't make any trouble about them being here. You're

the star. You can have anyone you like in. MITSOU (*regally*): It'd hardly be worth while being a star, if you couldn't have guests. But I don't have people in here, and I don't want the company of people whom I haven't met.

FLUFF (*urgently*): Just for a minute only, Mitsou. In your great wardrobe. They're so handsome. (*Without waiting for an answer, she calls in a low voice into the corridor.*) Here you two, come quickly! At the double!

She brings into the dressing-room two young second-lieutenants, one in khaki and one in sky-blue. The khaki one is good-looking, the blue is better looking.

MITSOU (*looking at them as if they were two chairs*). All this is nothing to do with me.

KHAKI LIEUTENANT: Miss Mitsou, we admired your act enormously in the first part. May I introduce . . .

MITSOU (*apparently not hearing, speaking to Fluff over Khaki Lieutenant's head*): You must understand that if it came into my gentleman friend's head to visit here, before my number Two, with his party that he's got a box for—well, there'd be a very pleasant scene for me in my dressing-room.

BLUE LIEUTENANT (*annoyed at being ignored*): Miss Mitsou, I will not inflict on you any longer a company that . . .

MITSOU (*continuing to speak to Fluff in the same tone*): You must understand too, that so far as I'm concerned I don't care at all whether they're in my wardrobe or where they are. That's not the question. It's just the way things will be. You know I'm not the sort of girl . . .

FLUFF (*overwhelmingly*): I do, darling; I do, I do! But you will do it for me! You are always so sweet. (*To the lieutenants*) Jump to it, you! Into the wardrobe. (*To Mitsou*) The house is full of things; do you know Boudou found one of last year's call-up in the hanging cupboard of that great cow Weiss? He says he's going to tell the management. Old Boudou is a regular stomach-ache. . . .

BOUDOU (*half-opening the door, helpful but suspicious*): You're on in five minutes, Miss Mitsou. (*He looks fixedly at Fluff, who has shut the wardrobe door on the lieutenants.*)

FLUFF (*friendly*): How are you, Boudou? How's the foot?

BOUDOU (*coldly*): So-so. . . . If it isn't better on Thursday I shall wash 'um, and then I shall put on a cotton sock and a woollen sock.

FLUFF: Great sufferings call for heroic remedies, Boudou.

He goes out. Fluff opens the wardrobe. The two prisoners, obediently in position flat against the back of it, wouldn't give up their place for the D.S.O.

They are highly entertained and say nothing at all.

FLUFF: Well! He'd have caught you all right but for me. The old snooper. I'm on, I'm on! I can hear the finale of "Poisons of Hell". I must run—stay where you are—I'll be back. (*She kisses them both with fantastic speed and skill. In a low voice, to Blue Lieutenant, pointing at Mitsou*) Don't rely much on her to keep the conversation going. . . . (*She runs out squealing.*) Be good, darlings! You're in refined company now.

This Parthian flattery gets a condescending smile out of Mitsou. Left alone with the two young men, who are still upright and still inside the wardrobe, Mitsou throws off her kimono, which leaves her clothed in tights attached to long strawberry stockings and, above, a tulle vest. Calmly, she tightens and ties at her waist the tape of the tights, opens her thighs to fix the flap properly, inserts herself carefully into the red and black froth of tulle which is her costume ("Jacqueminot Rose"), powders her armpits and the cleavage of her breasts—in short, shows in all her actions a sullen lack of interest, a careless impropriety that prevents any thought of coquetry. As she does this, she thinks it her duty to throw at the lieutenants the remark: "You all right in the cupboard?" It is as dry as a biscuit, and it annoys them.

BLUE (*all eyes, but most formal*): Perfectly all right, Madame, thank you very much.

MITSOU: Oh, now I've become Madame, have I? Talk of rapid promotion; that's quick enough. (*Silence. She tries to hook together a belt behind her, and cannot.*) Where's that old hag Whatshername got to now, the dresser?

BLUE (*stepping out of the cupboard*): Can I help you, Madame?

MITSOU: I can't say no. Look, there are four hooks on the upper part of the leather; I can deal with the rest; they're press-studs. (*She offers him her bare back quite coldly.*) Thank you so much.

She says her "Thank you" without turning round to the picture in her mirror; two young dark heads with big eyes, that might be brother and sister. Mitsou smiles, Blue Lieutenant smiles, and they look even more alike.

BLUE LIEUTENANT (*bowing*): Don't mention it, ma'am. (*He gets back into the wardrobe. A silence.*)

MITSOU (*sits down, points to the divan*): I'm not suggesting you should sit on that, because as long as Boudou isn't on stage, you're in danger. As soon as he has gone down to make the noises off, you can go. It's Boudou in the wings who makes the Howl of the Damned, the Infantry Man, and the Flower Pot that falls out of the Window.

KHAKI (*in order to say something*): A regular Proteus.

MITSOU (*innocently*): No, his name is Old Boudou. It's always been him, ever since the revue started. (*A silence. Mitsou is painting her fingernails.*)

BLUE (*civilly*): And are you pleased with the parts you have in the revue, Madame? (*His voice is cold but his eyes are hot. Each time he calls Mitsou "Madame" she raises her well-arched eyebrows.*)

MITSOU: Yes, very pleased. Especially as in this theatre it is not just a matter of talent if you want to be a success.

BLUE AND KHAKI: No? Really?

MITSOU (*importantly*): The difficulty about getting a part here is a matter of age. The management never takes on any girl, not one, who's over twenty-five. It's a house-rule. I'm twenty-four.

BLUE: So am I.

MITSOU: No! Not really? That is funny.

BLUE: Comedy can be found anywhere.

KHAKI: Do you think Miss Fluff is only twenty-five?

MITSOU: So she says. But I expect you know her much better than I do.

KHAKI AND BLUE: No, indeed not.

MITSOU: How on earth's that?

KHAKI (*by himself*): We only met her this evening. One of our friends introduced us and he ran away, the rat, as soon as the trouble started. You know, the 1917 call-up who was caught with Madame Weiss. We never knew the rules were so strict in a café-concert.

MITSOU (*shocked*): This is *not* a café-concert, it is a Music-Hall. Anyway, that's the way things should

be. If there weren't rules, you'd see some goings on. Now I'm allowed to have guests; it's in my contract.

BLUE: And do you have many guests?

MITSOU (*dignifiedly*): What are you thinking of? Nobody at all, of course.

As she says this, there is a knock on the door. Mitsou, startled, half opens her mouth, raises her eyebrows and says nothing. Another knock, and the door is opened. In comes Mitsou's Gentleman Friend, a respectable man, in the full bloom of his fifties.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*kissing Mitsou's hand*): My little dear! (*He turns and sees the two lieutenants in the wardrobe, and gives a small cry*) Oh! (*He is nervous. Then he pulls himself together and tries to be nonchalant.*) I told you, my dear, you'd never have room enough in that wardrobe for all your bits and pieces.

The two young men come out of the wardrobe. Their faces show clearly that they hope they're going to have "some real fun" now.

MITSOU (*unused to emotional dramas, loses her tongue for a moment; she gets it back only to tell the bare truth. To the Respectable Man, pointing to the two officers*): They're not mine; they're Bit-of-Fluff's.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*sharply*): Mitsou!

MITSOU: Boudou nabbed them in her dressing-room and she shoved them in my wardrobe. . . .

BLUE: From which, Madame, we now withdraw, laying at your feet our apologies and our deep respect.

KHAKI (*echoing*): . . . pologies . . . eep respect. . . (*To the Respectable Man*) Good day, sir.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*purple*): Good day. Good day. (*The door closes on the lieutenants. A silence.*) Now, Mitsou.

MITSOU: Now what? (*The Respectable Man stays reproachfully silent.*) Oh, because of *that*! Really, what a thing to fuss over I've told you; they belong to Fluff. I can't make up stories, I never could. Seeing me look as silly as this you ought to of known I'm telling the truth

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Two officers! Two at once! Mitsou, Mitsou, I never suspected you of that particular vice.

MITSOU (*very sad*): Nor did I. Not that vice, nor any other.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*touched*): Yes. . . . That's true, Mitsou. But all the same you must admit that appearances are against . . . And they're good-looking too. . . . Especially the one in blue.

MITSOU (*looking up at the mirror which a few minutes ago was reflecting two young faces*): D'you think so?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: What's his name?

MITSOU (*surprised*): Well, there you are! It's a fact. I don't know their names, or who they are, or anything.

FLUFF (*in the corridor*): Are you in, Mitsou?

MITSOU (*sternly, opening the door*): You'd better come in, anyway.

FLUFF (*out of breath*): Did you send them away? A bit of luck I ran into them. They were going down into the cellars, and . . .

MITSOU: The first thing you've got to do is to apologise to my friend here. He nearly had heart failure. Think of how he felt; coming here and finding two soldiers in my wardrobe!

FLUFF (*nestling up to the Respectable Man, merely out of habit*): Oh, did you *really*, sir? You mustn't be angry with me, please; I am so sorry; and you mustn't be angry with Mitsou either. They were such nice boys. Did you notice them? Especially the one in blue. And his eyes!

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*jealous*): His eyes? No, not really. Had he a glass eye, or what?

FLUFF (*shocked*): A glass eye! A glass eye! I never saw an eye so . . . so burning with life. And his mouth, did you look at his mouth? Mitsou, did you look at his mouth? And his nose—his beautiful fine nostrils that quivered when he breathed fast! Oh! . . . All the same, now I think of it, Khaki isn't too bad either. He has such a lovely complexion, did you notice?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*drily*): I'm afraid I did not give it such careful thought as you did.

FLUFF (*vibrant*): Nothing ever escapes me; it's always

so. Excuse me mentioning it, though, sir; if you don't go now you'll miss the Dance of Moroccan Dustmen!

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: I've already seen it.

FLUFF (*all the lady*): Then you will be staying with us? It will be such a pleasure.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: I'm afraid not. I must go back to my guests. There are two millers, whom I left in my box.

FLUFF: Two millers! Oh! Do introduce them to me, please; are they good-looking?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: One is my uncle and one is his brother-in-law; they own a flour-mill.

FLUFF (*as if she had been offered medicine*): Pff! A couple of flour-sifters!

(*The Respectable Man goes out.*)

MITSOU (*superiorly*): I hope you have thought of all the trouble you might have caused me this evening, with your army attachments. It's very lucky my friend is a really intelligent man.

FLUFF (*equally superior*): An intelligent man expects his girl some day or other will be unfaithful to him, as she would be to Tom, Dick and Harry. If he doesn't, he's not an intelligent man. And as for trouble—trouble! Life's nothing but trouble!

She throws herself down on the divan, quivering all over, but carefully avoiding rubbing her knees on it, so as to spare her silk stockings.

MITSOU (*pompous and thresque*): I don't know what trouble is, in that sense, thank goodness. Not for the last three years anyway, since I've gone with Pierre.

FLUFF (*opening her little eyes wide*): No! Go on! I don't believe you. Not even an argument? Not so much as a reconciliation?

MITSOU: Nothing. He never quarrels with me. And I don't pick on him. It's ever so peaceful.

FLUFF: Well. . . . Can't be a great deal of fun, always, the life you lead. And then, what about the front?

MITSOU: The front? What do you mean, the front?

FLUFF (*stammering*): The front! *THE* front, Mitsou! Really! There's a war on, haven't you heard? You surely must have someone you're soft on, at the front?

MITSOU: Why, no; I've been going with Pierre since June 1914, you see.

FLUFF (*legs in the air*): What a reason! Oh, well. About those boys, those awfully sweet boys, what part of the front are they in just now?

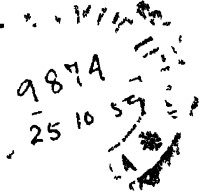
MITSOU: I don't know.

FLUFF: Didn't you ask them?

MITSOU: No.

FLUFF: Well, what on earth did you talk about?

MITSOU: Oh, I don't know. . . . They asked me if I liked the parts I'd got in the revue.



FLUFF (*jumping up*): About the rēvue! About the parts you play! What a thing to talk about to lieutenants on leave! From the front! Where were you dragged up? Oh God, I haven't got their address! I must have it. I must have *them*.

She shoots into the corridor like a bullet. The old Dresser returns; she comes in noiselessly. Mitsou is daydreaming and doesn't hear her.

OLD WOMAN (*in a faint voice in Mitsou's ears*): They've reached "Flowers in Prison".

MITSOU (*starts forward, holding her breast, and squeaking*): Oh! You! You—you'll make me die of heart failure, anyone can see. Where did you learn these tricks? Behaving like a ghost.

OLD WOMAN (*in a whisper*): I was a hospital nurse before the war.

MITSOU: You've got some deaths on your conscience then. Deaths from a stroke. Give me that lance!

She picks up a wooden lance wreathed in roses, and looks at her own flower-like image in the glass. On a very young face, is there much difference between a look of passive peace and a look of hopelessness? . . . Fluff bursts in, waving a postcard and jumping with both feet at once.

FLUFF (*squealing*): I've got it, I've got it! Names addresses, Army unit, everything!

MITSOU: Have they gone, then?

FLUFF: Gone? We can't get rid of them. They say it's

much more amusing here than in the audience.

^ I'll do my piece and rush upstairs again.

MITSOU: Where are they?

FLUFF: In Christophe Colomb's hanging-cupboard.

What a do, ducky! We're passing them pints of beer through the curtain— and sandwiches—and laughing our heads off.

She runs off quacking with pleasure. Mitsou goes towards the stage, with the chastened and resigned expression of a good little girl.

TWO days later. *Scene: the same. Ten o'clock.*
MITSOU is putting on the costume she wears in the final scene—the Pageant of Victory in red. The costume consists of a wisp of flame-coloured muslin and a sort of belly-band of crimson velvet. There is also a wooden sword, painted silver.

MITSOU (*yawning*): I don't know what's wrong with me tonight. My stomach's all knotted up, and I've a pain in the scallops round my ribs. I must have eaten too many calories, as my gentleman friend says. (*The Old Woman, still with her decoration and wooden shoes, shakes a dissenting head.*) You? Do you know what calories are?

OLD WOMAN: Of course I do.

MITSOU: Well, I don't; when my gentleman friend explains calories to me I always think I'm going to understand, and then just at the same moment it always all collapses—(*dreamily*) like everything else, for that matter. He never has any luck with me. (*A silence. Mitsou looks at herself in the glass. Then suddenly—*) And anyway I'm sick of all this red! Red always! Jacqueminot Rose first, then the Red Heart of Victory—blast it! How far've they got, down there?

OLD WOMAN (*learned and witty*): *Chi lo sa?*

MITSOU: You can cut that out; it doesn't impress me.
Open the door so's we can hear.

OLD WOMAN (*having opened the door*): It's the number
"Tropical Fruit". I can hear Miss Bit-of-Fluff's
voice.

MITSOU: Yes, you've got good ears. (*Silence. A knock.*)
Who's there?

A VOICE: Parcel for Miss Mitsou. (*The Old Woman
receives the parcel, hands it to Mitsou. Mitsou turns it
over and over, and at last undoes it. Inside are two flasks
and a jar for powder, all of fine cut glass. Also a letter.*)

MITSOU (*reading aloud slowly*):

Madame,—This is the lieutenant in blue, by himself, for my khaki friend's leave was up before mine. The evening before last I realized when I left the music-hall that you must have spent all your month's salary on buying the 16 H.P. Renouhard that was waiting for you. The face powder in your dressing-room was bursting out of its box, and the bottle of lavender water still had the Bon Marché label on it. As a way of thanking you for a hospitality which was forced on you, I wonder if you would be willing to put both the powder and the scent in this glassware? It's not very expensive but—if I may break the truth to you gently—there's a war on.

Your most obedient servant,
The Lieutenant in Blue.

MITSOU (*having read this with difficulty, looks at the three glass objects, then at the letter, then at the objects, and then starts, re-reading the letter in an undertone*):

Madame,—'his is the lieutenant in blue, by himself—, (*in a louder voice, to the Old Woman*)
What does he mean by calling me Madame?

OLD WOMAN: He's' being tactful.

MITSOU: It may be tact, but it's not polite. Give me that powder-pot and I'll put my powder in it.

OLD WOMAN: It's not a powder-pot.

MITSOU: Not a powder-pot?

OLD WOMAN: No. It's a jam-pot.

MITSOU (*outraged*): A jam-pot! Why don't you call it a coffee-pot and have done?

OLD WOMAN (*obstinate*): Because it *is* a jam-pot. It's a glass jar to put jam in, a Restoration piece and very pretty too. But I suppose you can put powder in it.

MITSOU: So nice of you to give me permission. (*Bell rings in the corridor. Mitsou gets up in a rush*) I'm on. I'm on. Quick, give me my sword. If it isn't too much trouble while I'm on stage, will you put the powder in the jam-jar and the lavender water in the flasks? Put it in both of them, so's they're filled up to the same level.

She goes out. The Old Woman behaves in a most unnatural manner. That is to say, she does fill the flasks up, and doesn't steal any scent for her own

handkerchief or to put in a little bottle for herself. Even though she is by herself, she neither snorts, nor belches, nor picks her nose, nor reads the letter lying on the table, nor even pinches the cotton wool. Obviously, she is one of the remarkable characters thrown up by the war. There is a knock,

OLD WOMAN (*swiftly hiding the letter and envelope in the pocket of her apron*): Come in.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*handsome, as ever; and fifty, as ever*): Miss Mitsou on the stage?

OLD WOMAN: Yes, sir. Victory in Red, sir.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*stopping in front of the glass-ware*): What are those?

OLD WOMAN: Two flasks and a powder-jar, sir. I call it a powder-jar, sir, but as a matter of fact——

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*interrupting*): I mean where do they come from?

OLD WOMAN: Dauvel's, sir. You can see the label.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*impatiently*): Who sent them to her?

OLD WOMAN: I don't know, sir. Perhaps Miss Mitsou bought them herself. She's certainly not very well off for things on her dressing-table; look at what——

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Not well off? The whole place is a disgrace! I've wanted a hundred times to . . . But she always told me that a music-hall dressing-

room was . . . And that, anyhow, for a show about the war . . .

OLD WOMAN (*touched*): Oh, she has such a warm heart!

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*carrying on*): . . . for a show about the war that quite likely wouldn't last more than a fortnight. . . . (*He walks up and down in a state.*) I tell you, I've been very firm. . . . I have a furnishing firm which was going to . . .

Once more his sentence peters out. The Respectable Man starts sentences excellently, and easily, but he hardly ever ends them. A silence. Re-enter Mitsou, who comes out of Red Victory as if it had been a Turkish bath. On the way she has undone her tiny crimson girdle, taken off her crown of gilt laurels, and is dragging her silver sword behind her like a broomstick.

MITSOU (*opening the door and panting*): Oo! There isn't half a crowd out there tonight. (*Seeing her friend.*) Oh, there you are.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*kissing her hand*): My little dear! How are you?

MITSOU (*who has seen the letter has vanished*): Hot. As you can see. Have you got a season ticket here? Or are you running after Fluff? (*She sits down and takes off her shoes with a sigh—not a sentimental sigh at all.*) Oh, my feet, my feet! (*She is watching the Respectable Man's face in the glass.*)

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Mitsou.

MITSOU (*taking off her make-up*): Here I am.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: I didn't know you had this glassware.

MITSOU: I didn't either.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Did you buy them yourself?

MITSOU: Do I have to do my own shepping too?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Then in that case . . . From whom or from what . . . what is the meaning . . .

MITSOU (*looking like a dissolving rose under the vaseline*): A gift from an admirer.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: From a what?

MITSOU: Just from an admirer.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Oh. Indeed. Well, this admirer, Mitsou. May one know his name?

MITSOU: You may perhaps. I don't.

Suddenly she realizes that she has spoken the exact truth, and it doesn't sound like it at all. She exchanges a sparkling look with her reflexion in the glass; behind her eyes is a laughing imp, and a new one—the imp of craftiness.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*vexed*): Madam is pleased to jest.

MITSOU (*turning round, and in an unexpectedly sharp voice*): "Madam!" What do you mean, "Madam"? Why are you calling me that?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*startled*): Why, Mitsou! It's just a way of speaking. . . . One says 'Madam is pleased to jest' as one says 'Madam is too kind'.

MITSOU (*stiffly*): Oh, is it? It so happens that to-night I am not pleased to jest, and I am not too kind.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Oh, Mitsou!

MITSOU (*working herself up*): So it's true then!

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: What's true?

MITSOU (*as before*): It's true that you pick on me. You demand to know who sent me that glass. I reply to you "I don't know", because I *don't* know. I don't make a habit of telling stories: I'm not that sort of girl. You know quite well, if I get flowers on the opening night, or anything at all, I always show you the cards and the messages. Don't I?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Yes, yes, Mitsou; you do.

MITSOU: Very well then! So when I tell you I don't know who sent me this—this (*an anxious look at the Old Woman*) this jam-jar, the reason is that I don't know. Is that clear?

THE RESPECTABLE MAN (*who hasn't heard anything like this in three years which passed without a cloud, and without any sunshine either*): Of course it is, Mitsou! My little dear, don't worry! It's the heat. . . . And three matinées a week too. Tomorrow I'll have them send to your dressing-room a flask of a special 1848 brandy. . . .

MITSOU (*nervous, dressing herself*): No, no! Not any more flasks, for goodness' sake. Let's go! (*Looking at her room with hatred.*) It's disgusting in here! The

wallpaper is filthy and insanitary. The table makes me sick. Pff!

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: But you never would allow me . . . I'll have the furnishing firm send tomorrow to . . . (*A knock.*)

MITSOU (*very overwrought, and jumping*): Who is that? Who is that?

A VOICE: Madame Mitsou?

MITSOU: Yes. What of it?

A VOICE: A message from madam's chauffeur. He will wait for madam at the corner of the street with madam's car, because the police have refused to allow him to park where he usually waits for madam.

THE RESPECTABLE MAN: Thank you very much, my man. (*He opens the door slightly and hands out a tip. As he turns round again, he is astounded to see tears in Mitsou's eyes.*) My little dear! What is the matter?

MITSOU: Nothing at all . . . (*Stammering*) It's . . . it's . . . it's the heat . . . and then, three matinées all in one week (*suddenly bursting into tears*) . . . and then too what do they mean by it? All these beasts tonight, all calling me madam! (*She goes downstairs crying, the Respectable Man following her in great distress.*)

III

MITSOU'S apartment. A ground floor flat with "every convenience"—every convenience that can be bought for 3,000 francs rent in the Trocadero district. Two fairly large rooms looking on the street, two smaller rooms looking on the courtyard. The courtyard, of course, is "a large, very light square adorned with green trees". The bathroom, cupboards, kitchen and usual offices form a sort of indeterminate zone between the courtyard and the street, rather ill-lit, partly by electricity and partly by bluish daylight filtering in between two service lifts. In this indeterminate zone you breathe the inevitable and dismal smell of wine cellars, gas, clean sinks and metal polish.

Mitsou's furniture is extraordinary, but her intentions were impeccable. Ever since she has had enough money she has collected round her, with a sort of humble greediness, all the things she longed for in her poverty-stricken childhood. Everything is there. There is an electric-light Gothic crown in copper hanging over the dining table, whose glass jewels flash colours on to the elegant monogrammed dinner service in white and gold. And damask table linen, my dear! And a double bed decorated with garlands, on to

which two carved cherubs drop from the ceiling a cascade of embroidered tulle. And a chaise-longue in three pieces (it would be better in a thousand pieces) all in silk damask. There is even, next to it, a small lady's desk to which you feel you ought to say, kindly: "This isn't the right place; you've come to the wrong floor", it is so unexpectedly delicate and full of years and grace, pink like a dried rose.

If the sheets on the bed aren't as fine as they might be, Mitsou has increased the value of their ordinariness by hemstitching and adding fine lace a foot long. You would not expect or wish any other colours than blue and white in the bathroom, or that the modern, "so practical", dressing-table would be anything but one of those masterpieces of metalwork which combine the beauties of a dentist's chair and an American office desk. As for the parlour—no, I shall not describe the parlour. I have distressed you enough already. But take just a glimpse among the true or fake Dresden figures, the Louis XV bric-à-brac and the ornamented snuff boxes—take just a glimpse of the fat arrogance of that new-art cushion, splodged like a clown's face, and striped like a railway signal, like a jockey's cap, like a make-up towel that's been used all the week. Back away from a combination sofa and bookcase, in embossed bronze, violet plush, painted whitewood and mother of pearl . . . come and find Mitsou in her boudoir (looking on the courtyard) next to her

bedroom (the same). The sun shines uselessly into the parlour and dining-room; they are shrines reserved by Mitsou for "company", which means she never sets foot in them.

It is half-past eleven. Mitsou in the morning is doing her housework; she is armed with that pointless weapon which cleans nothing and never dirties its user, a feather duster. She pats the treasures in her boudoir with it. She is wearing pink pyjamas, with tight tulle ruffles at the ankles, wrists and neck, and has a "Chinese" hairdo.

MITSOU (*to the maid*): If I've told you once I've told you twenty times; it's the electric lamps that go farthest from the clock and the candlesticks nearest.

THE MAID (*who looks like all maids who don't get enough sleep*): Oh yes. So it is I never remember

MITSOU (*looking at her*): You look as if you've got indigestion today.

THE MAID (*simply*): No, a'am; it's just that my fiancé's seven-days leave ended this morning.

MITSOU: Oh. Is it still the same fiancé? The sergeant?

THE MAID: Yes, the same one. Only he's a second lieutenant now.

MITSOU (*alert*): Oh, is he? How is he dressed?

THE MAID (*surprised*): Dressed? Why, dressed like a second lieutenant in the Zouaves.

MITSOU (*not interested now*): Oh, of course, a Zouave.

Zouaves don't wear blue. (*The telephone rings*). Will you see who that is?

THE MAID (*returning*): It was monsieur, to tell madam he will not be coming to lunch. The shareholders' meeting is going on too long.

MITSOU (*who doesn't care*): Goody. (*Humming*) Goody-goody-goody-goody-good. . . ! You can tell Julieanne not to bother with the aubergines. I don't care about them.

Silence. More dusting. Mitsou doesn't know anything at all about real housework. She can arrange flowers in a pot, and after three attempts can get a curtain's folds to fall right. But she doesn't know how to polish brass or copper, or give a looking-glass the sheen of clear water that it should have, or make mahogany shine with dark oil. She will learn these things, when wrinkles, plumpness and avarice first come to her.

MITSOU (*with a sudden cry*): Louise! (*The maid comes back.*)

The result of all that is, I'm going to be quite alone for lunch.

THE MAID: As so often.

MITSOU (*crossly*): Yes, maybe as so often. But today, the way I feel, it'll spoil my appetite.

THE MAID: There is madam's mother who might be willing to come.

MITSOU: On a Saturday? It'd take more than a lunch for mummy to leave her Saturday customers.

~~Saturdays~~ she does the Tarot cards for the Duchess of Montmoreau, and tells tea-leaves for an alderman. Not a hope.

THE MAID: Madam has her singing master.

MITSOU (*disgusted*): Yes, and listen to his plate going ~~click-clack~~ all the time he eats. You suggest the horrid~~est~~ things. (*Brightening*) I know! Telephone Miss Fluff and ask her to come to lunch.

THE MAID: Miss Fluff has got a telephone?

MITSOU: Yes. Wagram 6666.

THE MAID: Wagram 6666? That's the milkman.

MITSOU: The milkman? You're being funny.

THE MAID: I am not a funny person. I just rang that number at eleven o'clock. Julianne had forgotten to get the cheese.

MITSOU (*staggered*): Well . . . ring it all the same. I'll swear I'm right.

THE MAID (*coming back, displeased and superior*): Miss Fluff will come to lunch.

MITSOU: There you are! I told you.

THE MAID: Miss Fluff has a room at the back of the milkman's. He lets her use his telephone. I said she wasn't the sort of person to . . .

MITSOU (*interrupting, on her dignity*): the sort of person to be waited on by a maid whose hair was all over the place and with pillow feathers in it. Go and comb it. I don't want to see ends in my house when I never have a hair out of place myself.

The maid goes out. Mitsou whisks the dust off the glass of a showcase; it is no particular advantage that you can now see the contents more clearly. Then she dresses. It takes only five minutes because she is "all ready underneath" as they say. She has suède shoes, pink voile knickers and you can see her through her chemise as you can see a prize fruit through its muslin. Over it all she pulls a child's old fashioned dress, or rather an old fashioned child's dress, a green taffeta which has no cut, no waist, no shoulders, no anything—not even any skirt below the calf.

Mitsou is doing her nails—rather badly; that is to say, wasting a lot of colour and varnish—when Fluff arrives, with as much noise and fuss as a terrier. If she stayed still a moment you would notice that her jersey suit came from the cheapest department store, and her dented military cap had more cardboard than felt in it, and her shoes were almost worn out; but she never gives you time to observe all those details. She has a wide grey rabbit-fur collar which makes her summer suit "so chic" and comes right up to Fluff's eyes, which you can see are blue—or at least the eyelids are.

FLUFF (*pulling back a step after the necessary kisses, squeaks and "darlings"*): What was it made you think of asking me to lunch?

MITSOU (*embarrassed*): Oh, I don't know. The fine weather, the . . . the aubergines. Do you like aubergines?

FLUFF: I can eat them.

MITSOU: I said to myself that you were sure to be the sort of person who liked aubergines. Now take off your fur; there's only the two of us; and your hat.

FLUFF: Your place is pretty. I've only been here before for a few moments in the evening; you can't see properly in artificial light. It's luck you don't have any sun in here; sun fades all the curtains, and the colours in pictures too aren't always fast.

MITSOU (*modestly*): Oh, there's nothing remarkable here. But it's all personal. I wouldn't let anyone advise me about choosing my things.

FLUFF: Nobody but you can know your own taste. You must never let any one else influence you when it comes to furnishing. Look at me; I've only got a tiny place, but if I'd listened to what people said to me I'd have thrown my collection away twenty times over.

MITSOU: Your collection of what?

FLUFF: My collection of souvenirs of travel.

MITSOU (*surprised*): Have you travelled a lot, then?

FLUFF: No, never. They're the travel souvenirs of people whom I've known. Before the war, I knew people from all over the place.

MITSOU: That must have been interesting.

FLUFF (*contemptuously*): Pooh! Don't talk to me of foreigners. Since the war started, I see life only in khaki—or in blue.

MITSOU (*quickly*): Well, now, that reminds me; I was just going to—

THE MAID: Lunch is served, madam.

MITSOU: After lunch I've got something to ask you.

She takes Fluff with her. Arm in arm they go, and sit down under the Gothic crown. Lunch: sardines, radishes; tasteless lemon sole; grey coloured beef and sodden potatoes; stuffed aubergines. Mitsou doesn't yet know either how to eat herself or how to arrange a dinner. The young ladies drink an excellent Chablis, it is true (a present from the Respectable Man), but they have no idea that it's good.

FLUFF (*looking at a plate*): They can say what they like, there's nothing like white porcelain for being distinguished, you know. Specially with an initial on. Your name—is that an Arab name you took?

MITSOU: No, it's my friend made it up. It's made out of initials. Pierre is managing-director of two companies; one is called *Minoteries Italo-Tarhaises*, and the other *Scieries Orléanaises Unifiées*. That makes M.I.T.S.O.U.; Mitsou.

FLUFF (*guffawing*): No!

MITSOU (*laughing too*): Yes!

FLUFF (*twisting herself*): Oh, oh, oh! And to think that I—what was it?—Oh, damn, I don't know, a friend I was introduced to the day before yesterday—anyway, I told him your name was Persian.

MITSOU: Persian?

FLUFF: Yes, you know, like the Russian ballet. Fancy that. (*They laugh.*) Oh, it does you good to
 zhl!

MITSOU: Yes, it cheers you up.

FLUFF: Why, do you want cheering up?

MITSOU (*reticently*): Not exactly. Just recently I've been feeling a bit off.

FLUFF: It's the time of the year. Me too, the theatre doctor listened to my chest the other day and told me I needed the country—fresh air, better food and a holiday. So I took his prescription out of his hands and signed it: "Wilson, Poincaré, Albert, George, Victor Emmanuel, exccetera." Oh, Lord! country air and better food! Here's to the end of the war, and a motor car for me!

MITSOU: The country! I've never been in the country myself, except twice, when Pierre took me in the car. I'm a Parisian and the country makes me ill. The time when Pierre took me to the Loving Couple—don't get excited; it's the name of an hotel—I don't know what came over me. The sun setting, up there; and then the clouds; and the sky that seemed to go on for ever. It turned me up. I felt a sort of dizziness and stuffiness, a kind of choking, and I cried and cried. "Take me away", I kept saying to Pierre, "take me away; I think I'm going to die." It all went off in Paris.

I think the country doesn't agree with me, you know.

FLUFF (*whom the Chablis has made slightly tipsy*): Fresh air has a special effect on me. As soon as I ~~get out~~ in the country I want to go to bed.

MITSOU: Really! Does it make you as ill as that?
(*Fluff's indecent laugh enlightens her*) Oh, Fluff! Don't you ever think of anything but that?

FLUFF: Don't you think of it sometimes?

MITSOU (*tipsy too, but sad*): Well, yes, sometimes, beforehand . . . but never during.

FLUFF (*flinging her hands in the air*): My God! I suppose it'll always be true: making love is a poor man's pleasure.

MITSOU: Oh, I don't know. . . . I'm not rich even now, but I've been poor, and even then . . . (*She shakes her head, utterly disillusioned.*)

FLUFF (*interested*): Do you really mean that? I shouldn't have thought it was possible. Poor darling Mitsou, you're going to . . . (*because of the maid, who brings in the coffee*) you're going to dress shops that dress you much older than you ought to look. Go somewhere else.

MITSOU: I'm not the sort of customer who changes her tradesmen just for a fancy. Besides you know, the thought of moving, and changing—all the bother. I just stay sitting where I am.

FLUFF (*dirtyly*): Sitting down—that isn't a practical

position. *(They laugh. She smells the coffee and the cassis.)* Good old coffee! I can do without anything, but not coffee. Got any sugar, Mitsou?

MITSOU: Of course.

FLUFF: Enough for me to have two cups?

MITSOU: Of course. A cup of coffee always means two cups.

FLUFF: Not in restaurants, it doesn't.

MITSOU: I've got some cigarettes; would you like one?

FLUFF *(boasting)*: And so have I, thanking you. *(She lights one.)* Mine's Army tobacco too. It's those two pretty boys, the other night, who made me a present of them.

MITSOU *(taking the cigarette from Fluff's lips)*: Show us, please? Which one gave you them? The khaki or the blue?

FLUFF: I really don't remember now.

MITSOU: You've seen them again? Did you . . . *(She stops.)*

FLUFF *(slack and sozzled, sipping a large glass of cassis)*: Did I what? *(Mitsou says nothing.)* Oh, I see. No; have a bit of sense; there wasn't any time. They'd gone. It doesn't matter, though. I'll meet others, quite as good-looking.

MITSOU: Then you didn't . . .

FLUFF: No, I tell you, I didn't. I'd tell you if I did, wouldn't I?

(A pause. Cigarettes, coffee, cassis.)

MITSOU: You are nice, Fluff. We never seem to see each other.

FLUFF: When you work together, you don't have time to see each other.

MITSOU: How true that is! Think, about my friend: I've seen him every day for three years, and I haven't got anywhere, all the same.

FLUFF (*sententiously*): Yes, but it's bound to be so, in a case like that. A steady gentleman friend is like a guest. What can you talk about? His home, his business—they don't last long. "Good morning, dear, and how are the children? Has the youngest one quite got over his German measles? I don't like your partner's look. And the shareholders' meeting, was that amusing?" But a gigolo, a casual, a boy who takes your fancy, you know more about him in three-quarters of an hour than you do in three years about the other.

MITSOU: You don't say.

FLUFF (*firmly*): I'm telling you. In three-quarters of an hour—even less sometimes—you know how he makes love, you know if he's very cheerful afterwards, if he's short of money, if he's drawn his pay, if he likes your hat, if he knows your friends, if he bets, if he wants to see you again . . . in short, all the essentials. Even if you never see him again, he's a person, a memory, a man who really exists, you know.

MITSOU (*thoughtfully*): Yes, a memory. . . . And have you got a lot of them, these—these memories?

FLUFF (*pouring out some more cassis*): I should say so. And more to come.

MITSOU (*judiciously*): Oh, Fluff!

FLUFF (*quite tight now*): Oh, Fluff! Oh Fluff what? What's Fluff doing? Certainly, more to come. Is it my fault if we're living in times like this?

MITSOU: Times like what?

FLUFF (*more and more exalted*): Times like I don't suppose anybody's ever seen since the world *was* the world! Have you ever seen a time before when the streets were packed with young fellows, all kinds of them, beautiful boys dressed to kill, looking at the girls and the grub and their mouths watering? Did you ever? Of course not. And are we supposed not to touch? To keep off the grass? And people denounce us and say "Women's shamelessness has no limits! the creatures hang round the necks of our sons and our husbands and our brothers and our cousins!" I answer them back. I say to those people, I say "Madam!"

MITSOU (*moved, drinking more cassis*): Who to?

FLUFF (*not hearing*): "Madam! I am not the sort of person to sew shirts for soldiers! I am no good at bandages. Nor for parcels for the prisoners, as I haven't got a bean. I am the sort of girl for you-know-what, and I wouldn't turn round to watch

the lightning strike if a nice boy ~~was~~ in front of me. A nice boy, too, who might die tomorrow!"

MITSOU (*distressed*): Oh no, not tomorrow!

FLUFF (*going on*): "And, madam, unless you tie my arms and my legs, I 'am carrying on. And I shall open them, my arms, any moment I please, if I have a chance to make a boy happy even if it's only for ten minutes, if he's in khaki or if he's in blue!"

MITSOU (*with a squeal*): No, not the one in blue!

FLUFF (*brought down to earth*): What? What are you talking about? Who's in blue?

MITSOU (*distracted*): The one in blue! The one with the jam-pot! and the letter!

FLUFF (*leaves her chair and her cassis and runs to Mitsou*): Tell F-fluff, dearie; tell Fluff what it is.

MITSOU (*in a rush*): I want the address of the blue lieutenant that you put in my wardrobe and he sent me some glass and wrote to me and he didn't put his address on it (*She drops her head on to her folded arms.*)

FLUFF: Well, now, fancy that!

MITSOU (*raising her head and leaning against Fluff*): Now you understand. I know you've got his address. I didn't dare to ask you for it right away, Fluff; but do give it me, dear Fluff, please; please give me his address, please. (*She begins to cry.*)

FLUFF (*as if Mitsou had just earned a good conduct medal*):

Now that is nice! That is good, very good indeed!
Oh, excellent. You shall have it, of course you
shall. This is splendid.

She rocks her to and fro like a mother. Kisses,
whispers, planning. . . .

IV

Mitsou to the Blue Lieutenant

Dear Sir,—I do not know how to thank you for the pretty things you sent me. I know enough about beautiful things to see that they were chosen by someone with excellent taste. If you do me the honour of coming to see me again, you will find many changes in my dressing-room and you will see that your pretty crystalware occupies the place of honour there.

Very sincerely yours,

Mitsou

P.S. If I dared, I would like to ask you the date of your next leave.

Blue Lieutenant to Mitsou

Madame,—You made a fearful bargain with me. To send to you the most modest, ordinary triviality, and to get in answer a letter in which humour, spontaneity and Parisian grace all flower together—too much, it is too much. How my comrades would envy me if I showed them this letter, which they would certainly say was the beginning of an adventure! You see, they do not know that I am far from adventurous, and that you embody in the revue at the Empyrée-

Montmartre, the gravity of youth, the determination to behave well—in short, Madame, Propriety with a big P, a motor car and a reliable gentleman friend. Is there anything I have forgotten? I beg your pardon if so, with all the modesty of a man whose surname and Christian name you know, but who still obstinately prefers to remain your anonymous and respectful
Blue Lieutenant

Mitso' to Blue Lieutenant

Dear Sir,—I was very pleased to get your letter. It took only four days to come, which isn't much as things go nowadays—and they don't go very fast. Now and again some days are longer than others, you can't say why. Sometimes too there are compliments that don't please you and even make you sad, I thought that when I read your letter. I got more pleasure out of looking at your lovely handwriting than reading your letter, where there were bits that suggested you thought I was somebody else. If you wrote them in the hope that I wouldn't be able to understand them, it wasn't an awfully smart amusement for a young man like you. And if you thought I would understand them and be offended, then I can tell you I'm not upset, and a woman hasn't the time to be touchy when she has something else to think of. At least I've found out

from your letter what French officers mean by propriety—a tulle chemise and strawberry stockings.

I say “no hard feelings” to you and *au revoir*, and don’t forget next time that I asked for the date of your next leave.

Mitsou

Blue Lieutenant to Mitsou

Madame,—Few female letter writers could boast as you can of so many essentials in fifteen lines of handwriting: irony, the knowledge of what is correct, mystery. The Mystery of the Music-hall Star! What a title for a film serial in twenty-three reels! So those eyes, wide open at life, passing by, were lying, were they? Thought was going on behind them! As for irony, I have no right to be surprised at it, or I shall look an ill-mannered lout again. It is the natural result of living in the feverish atmosphere of the music-hall, and in the company of those jolly dogs, the Writers of Revues! I knew one once; he was a sparkling bureaucrat long past the age of even a reservist. He filled a counterfoil book every day with notes under the headings *Newsvalue*, *Indecency*, and *Lavatory Jokes*. Alphabetically.

As for my next leave, the Germans will fix the date of it. If they behave themselves, two months; if they attack, maybe never. Isn’t it disgusting that my visit

to your dressing-room should depend on people like these?

I remain, Madame, most respectfully your

Blue Lieutenant

Mitsou to Blue Lieutenant

You have chosen it, Sir, you are my Blue Lieutenant. See how funny words are. If I say "my lieutenant", it's nothing, but if I write "my blue lieutenant", it becomes nice. Fluff called one of her boy friends "my purple moorhen", but I'm not comparing that. I would rather you called me Miss Mitsou than Madame; I have no reason except that I don't like it.

I didn't find any "essentials" myself in your letter. Perhaps you didn't put any in. Except maybe the place where you were scoring off the poor old boys who write revues. That passage rather flattered me; it made me think I was talking to your respected father. Middleaged men like to make jokes about theatrical life as if they knew what goes on backstage, with little tee-hees and sniggers.

But when I read it again I saw it must be you. I saw you again just as you were in the wardrobe, and just as young. A young man must be very young not to know that when a woman tells him she is thinking of *something else* she really means *someone else*. Goodbye, my

Blue Lieutenant. Fluff sends you her best wishes, and I am praying nothing will happen to you.

Mitsou

Blue Lieutenant to Mitsou

Miss Mitsou, I think today I shall possibly write nothing but nonsense to you. One should never write to a girl after two sleepless nights, for one of which I was on guard duty. Miss Mitsou, your simplicity, your apparent simplicity intrigues me more than I like. So you spend your time thinking, do you? It's typical of our age group—class 13 isn't it? Me too; I think. I think about the family I belong to, about my job as a soldier, about the swift and rather brutish pleasures of my leaves and about—my pen-pal, you are going to bet. Then don't bet. I haven't got, and I don't want, a pen-pal. My friends, my comrades and my men, have let themselves go in such an epistolary orgy, such a wastefulness and gobbling of pen-pals that I stand aside, glugged by the hoggishness before I start. But what about you, Thinking Mitsou? Is it the pleasant face of my khaki friend that haunts you? How silly of me! It is, it must be, a civilian. We others, we just pass by, we are running already when we throw behind us a "Cheeri-oh . . . see you some time . . . maybe"; we promise, the civilians keep our promises. They are there—they are all there—what an advantage over us!

Perhaps your next letter will promote me to the rank of Confidant. It is correct; it is "the war", that a young Confidant, twenty-four years old and in the trenches, should listen to the romance of a *matinée* idol old enough to be his father. Miss Mitsou, I am all attention. I am prejudiced in your favour by a phrase that fell from your thoughtless pen, just at the moment I needed to read it: "I am praying that nothing happens to you."

Your respectful and tired
Blue Lieutenant

Mitsou to Blue Lieutenant

My Blue Lieutenant,—I couldn't help laughing when I read your letter, first of all because I was so pleased from the moment I saw the envelope, and next because you said "a phrase that fell from your thoughtless pen". Goodness! My thoughtless pen! It's obvious to see that writing comes easy to you. How could my pen be thoughtless, when I have to think of everything when I'm writing, spelling, handwriting, and what it is I want to say to you. Oh no, I'm never thoughtless in writing to you. And it's not just now when you're beginning to think not too badly of me that I'd let myself go.

So my letters don't bore you all that? What do you think I'd say of yours, then? What you don't guess is

that I've never corresponded with anybody before. I'm a Parisian and I don't move out of Paris. All the people I know are Parisian too, and for Parisians it's much easier to spend twopence on the telephone than write a letter. I would like to impress on you that it's really something in my life for me to start writing letters, and letters to you too. It's difficult for me to understand the difference between the letters I do write and the sort of letters you ought to be getting. But anyway I do write to you truthfully. And however silly Mitsou is, she will have sense enough to know when the time has come that she ought to stop writing to you. Thank goodness, that's the sort of thing one learns without needing lessons in grammar.

I admit I did try to tease you a little in my earlier letters. All right, and why not? The little I saw of you, you did seem so young to me, so solemn, almost a man-Mitsou. Like Mitsou you are afraid people will let you down, like her you take your job seriously and maybe like her you say: "I'll never forget we are twenty-four years old, and that playing the fool is for the elderly!" Because of the picture I've made of you, I have the idea that I ought to be forgiven everything but not to be forgotten anything. Anyhow I like to think we are rivals in a way, rivals like friends or twins I mean. It gives me a bit of courage, that is courage enough to ask some question. Questions like for example:

1. Is night duty really dangerous?

2. Could you do with some useless things? Because one's family always remembers to send you the really useful things, but not the others. I'd like very much to send you things that aren't at all necessary, but would amuse you.

The weather is lovely in Paris, now. I hope it's lovely with you, and especially I hope it's lovely two months from now, or I ought to say exactly a month and a half. I take advantage of the fine weather and get up at ten o'clock; you'll say that isn't so early; but there's no reason for me ~~to~~ get up earlier; there's no post before ten. I asked. There's another at twelve, and that's very convenient, because the person you met in my dressing-room comes to lunch at one and I like to have my letters before then. Afterwards I can go out shopping, or anything; I can do what I like; there's no post, I mean no post that brings anything, until seven o'clock or half-past.

At half-past six I eat a big high-tea, and as the post is very unreliable just now it sometimes happens I find a letter after I come back home after the performance. This is what happened with your last letter, and I was as excited by it as if I'd found a real living person in my room.

Now here I am writing you a very long and silly letter, but I liked so much writing it that I can't bear to tear it up. Goodnight, Blue Lieutenant, I am

thinking of you and hoping that this is not going to be another guard night.

Mitsou

Bye Lieutenant to Mitsou

I got your letter, Mitsou. I am reading it again; I am so astonished that a small young woman who goes around so easily with nothing on could hide so much of herself. I haven't forgotten, Mitsou, and I shan't forget all the details of the beautiful form that you let me watch, with such arrogant indifference, from the back of your wardrobe. But it wasn't while I was staring at you that I felt like calling out: "What sort of a person are you, Mitsou?" That is what I'm asking you now, though; just as if we'd never met. Mitsou with no grace of style, Mitsou with a schoolgirl's handwriting, you've never once failed to convey to me in your letters just exactly what you wanted to say nothing more nor less. You didn't answer me, Mitsou, when I asked you with a falsely indifferent air about the person who occupied your private thoughts. No, you didn't answer; you just gave me a very exact timetable of the postal deliveries in Paris.

Cunning Mitsou! You have just shown me how romantic even a railway timetable can be. It's both the most annoying and most charming moment in an affaire, when two beings who hardly know each other

yet, already have an inescapable compulsion to be together at a given time. . . . Mitsou, I am just going to call you Mitsou and nothing else. One word more, Mitsou, and I shall call you *tu*. No, I won't. The first *tu* should be a sudden cry which you can't resist; and there are no cries in a letter.

Why no, dear Mitsou, a night's guard isn't dangerous. But all the same, it is a trial; you carry two burdens that the long night makes very heavy. They are: responsibility and loneliness. Responsibility is the lighter of them; you know what it is, you know its limits, and you can face up to it. But loneliness fills you with dreams, with fears, with desires that you stamp on and reactions you suppress. In fact, it is unwise even to talk of them.

Do you really want to present me with what Richard Wagner—and he used French, by God—called the *enivrant superflu*? (He hadn't thought of your vivid phrase "Could you do with some useless things?") Yes, then; I could do with these useless things:

(1) A photograph of Mitsou.

(2) A piece of strawberry coloured velvet, the size of both my hands together, to be used to bind a book I am fond of. The exact shade to be that of Rose Jacqueminot.

That will be all for now. But my demands are by no means finished; tremble! Dear Mitsou, I kiss your long pretty paws respectfully and remain your

Blue Lieutenant

Mitsou to Blue Lieutenant

Dear Blue Lieutenant,—Lots of women when they got your letter would have imagined they were getting a love letter. But not me, thank goodness. In spite of the difficult words that I sometimes find in your letters there's no danger of my not understanding what they really mean. I'm flattered enough by them anyway not to start looking for impossibilities.

The picture of Mitsou and the velvet are going to you in a separate little parcel. The velvet is a good match; and the photograph is of "Rose Jacqueminot" too. But all that red is very depressing in a photograph. I don't want any parts in red any more; they make me dismal. Fluff wanted me to send you a little life-saving purse, like she sends to her boy friends. They're little purses in which she puts nothing but kisses. But I'm only sending you, as I did before, my true prayer that nothing will happen to you. The phrase has come back to me from the days when I had to write New Year messages on beautiful decorated notepaper when I was a little girl. I'm awfully sorry I can't invent a better one for you. My prayer is better than a fine phrase, because a phrase isn't anything real, and *it* is. It is as real as the swallow or the dove was on the fancy paper. I can see it, it flies around, it moves and has a face, it's all round you, on your head and on your breast—I can see it just as well as if I was there too on your breast I mean. Fluff's purse would certainly be very pretty

and lovely embroidered, but it wouldn't cover enough area. With my prayer, I'm less worried: it covers you all over.

You aren't half funny, dear blue lieutenant, asking me "Who are you, Mitsou?" I never expected to see you in the part of the compère in the revue who asks "But who is this beautiful girl?" If I was still in the Christmas revue at the Concert Majeur I would be wearing two wings, a helmet and a lance, and I'd answer "I am the Spirit of Heroic Love!"

But I am not the spirit of heroic love. I promise you I'm nothing out of the ordinary. You saw all of me on the wardrobe night; a small music-hall artist, young, not awfully ugly, popular with the public and without much talent. Now does this modesty surprise you? Oh come on, all we music-hall girls know very well where we are, in spite of the airs we seem to put on. Look at Fluff; she has found a line of her own by never for a moment staying still, "here I am and there I've gone". Now I'm a child type, I've got a nice innocent face, and eyes I open so wide it almost hurts my forehead, because that goes with my long legs and my small mouth and my almost-no-nose, and so the revue writers said "She'll be a smasher in the risky numbers; keep them for her!" See how simple it is. You haven't got a revue writer's mind, so don't try to see further than you have seen. I undressed in front of you, did I? Well, that shows I saw no harm in it, or I'd 've put

up the screen. I hardly spoke to you at all? It's only that I was behind the door when tongues were given out, as they say. To show you, I couldn't think of a word to say when you-know-who came into the dressing-room. That's really all. All about Mitsou who was a good little garment worker and got frightened of the two things she knew best, poverty and the workshop. So she took a fancy for the thing she knew least about, the stage. Everybody always thinks it easier to succeed in what they haven't learnt to do than the things they have learnt; it's natural.

As for the rest, my private life, you know it. You know who it depends on, or does until the day comes when I decide it shan't depend on him any more. My friends? It wouldn't take long to make the rounds of them. I'm too young to have men friends, at my age it gets spoilt at once. Women friends aren't easy either. You run into bad lots who have got no decency. They drink and they smoke opium. I know some who became typists or telephonists in a Ministry, but now they treat us others like dirt. Of course I meet others too who are just like me and they're the worst. After being with them an hour I say to myself: "Now, is that what I'm like? Am I like them already at my age, so colourless, so absolutely dull off stage? Better stay at home and stare in my mirror, it'll make me feel less bad." Well, there! It's quite easy to learn to live alone, at anyrate until something important happens. There's

only three important things that could happen in the lives of people like us—death, a great success on the stage, or love. Dear blue lieutenant, which is going to fall first on my head, or on my heart? I wish I knew.

No, don't kiss my hands, not even in a letter. They're not nice enough; the liquid white ruins the skin and besides I've put too much varnish on the nails. I'm looking after them, and I'll have them alright when you come. But kiss the crook of my arm; it has a lot of tiny rivers in blue and green and when you kiss it you need only be thinking of the army maps.

Your

Mitsou

P.S. But I too want a photograph!

Blue Lieutenant to Mitsou

Dear Mitsou,—I want to see you. I want to see you. What else is there to say to you? I want to see you. I feel gentle, weak, vague, turning towards something sweet, profound and indistinct that is calling me. I feel happy and yet deprived of everything, all at the same time. Anxiety and laziness too—both of them rather agreeable. An adolescent condition, I suppose. . . . Your photograph reminds me of two things—you; and a phrase of Francis Jammes about a young girl who “looked like a dark little rose, and was singing”. . . . Mitsou, will you kiss me? I am asking you that because

I would like it. Our long previous acquaintance, of eight whole weeks of truthfulness, compels me not to hide anything from you. Kiss me, Mitsou. When I think that I fastened a belt behind your back, taking care not to nip in the hooks your skin so little covered by the tulle. . . . I remember that the petunia-coloured rouge on your cheeks, and the harsh lights, made your arms and the bare down your back seem green, green like the white lilac that hothouses force to bloom in winter. . . . I remember that you quite coldly and chastely held up your slender arms to make it easy for me. . . . Mitsou, I don't like the smell of verbena. I only like one scent, the petals of a tea-rose dropped into a sandalwood box which has had very good tobacco in it; Mitsou's scent.

"A lot of changes in your dressing room?" Why? Wait a bit. Let me see it once again as I saw it *at that time*, from the back of the wardrobe. Don't change anything; only turn one piece of furniture out. A piece of furniture that came in when I was there, about fifty-five or fifty-six years old. A very bad period. Then everything will be all right. Dear, dear Mitsou, how I like everything about you, and especially how anxiously your letters describe for me your clean and sad life, as empty as a new attic! Do you know mine is almost as empty? Mitsou, we boys of twenty-four, the war grabbed us just as we came out of college. It made us into men, and I am afraid that we shall never

recover from having missed the time of growing up. We lost forever that precious period, in which we might have learnt poise and balance in voice and manner, and the habit of being free, and how to treat our families and how to approach women without being afraid or acting like cannibals—women, I mean, who would not be thinking only of our desires or our money. Mitsou, forgive me for boring you with all this. The reason is that just now my regrets have a special reason: am I going to throw at your feet an overgrown schoolboy or a much-too-young grown man, who will be like a fruit out of season, ripe on one side and green on the other?

Mitsou, listen. In ten days, Mitsou, I—well, in ten days I am going to be in Paris for forty-eight hours, on a special service. The brutality of that statement shocked me. I am blushing over it, as one blushes over the movement of one's hand over a breast or a bottom in a crowd, which one's ashamed of afterwards.

Here's the photograph of me you wanted. It is yellowish and not mounted, and I look very ugly frowning into the sun. The small rise that you see in the distance through the opening in the earth wall is the German lines—only four hundred yards away, damn them. How nice that crimson velvet smells; I had it with me in bed.

Your
Blue Lieutenant

Mitson to Blue Lieutenant

Dear Blue Lieutenant,—It's over now, the screwing up my courage to write to you; I'm going to see you. I've seen you already, in fact, in that photo you say is horrid, and all the same I feel sure, I feel so sure my head swims, that you chose it because you know how wonderful you look against the sky-line, and it shows your figure and the way you hold your head and stick your chin out. No, don't, don't say it's horrid; it's everything that I like and makes my heart beat faster. You know, I give up, now. Do you know, I've been holding myself back, ever since I wrote you that first stupid letter; I'd have liked to write to you quite simply: "I must see you again, because I've changed altogether and I think I'm in love with you". But how wise I was to hold back! First of all, it probably wasn't true then that I was in love with you. I hadn't really got the disease properly; it was like the beginning of flu. I don't know what state I was in; I complained to Fluff I kept going hot and cold; I asked the dresser for stomach pills and headache pills. You see I just didn't realize. Even your present you gave me, I looked at it as if it'd done something to me; I picked on it and nagged at it: "That blue lieutenant, I suppose he thinks I'm going to run after him because of a powder pot!" I mean, all sorts of stupidities and misinterpretations. I can't write clearly like you. However, as Fluff says "Keep your mouth shut and you won't make

mistakes"; I am relying a lot on my silence, for when you come here and are near me. Look at me, in such a hurry to turn myself inside-out-like for you, as if I was a basket of fruit to show that what's underneath is as good as the top. It's because I've been full for the last two months of new thoughts so nice and so worrying that I can't find words good enough to describe them.

Only a little while ago I was sure I wouldn't be able to write to you. And as it is I don't think this letter will be right about all those things that seem to me so important and so urgent. I've only just this moment thought that you've never seen me in ordinary clothes. It's awful. I don't know what to do. You never said if you liked small hats, and I almost never were anything else. My skirts aren't very short, anyhow. I hardly ever were very bright colours in the street; it's not right in wartime and anyway I like to get away from the rainbow colours on the stage. What I wore is navy blue, dark green, and black and white. I don't make my face up when I go out. My hats fit tight and I show my ears, because they're not large.

What else should I say? You've seen almost all the rest, and I wish you hadn't now. I really haven't anything seriously wrong with my body, except my toes a little bit, because of wearing fashionable shoes. And there's a scar, from an accident with a hatpin, on the back of my neck just where the hair begins. I shall never bow my head before you, though, unless I'm

ashamed or sorry, so it only depends on us two and you mayn't ever see it.

I don't know what's going to happen to me. I don't know if anything is going to happen to us. . . . Oh yes, I do hope something will. We are very young and liable to everything. But before having really known you and even if you forget me quickly I want to say thank you from my heart. Perhaps quite soon I shall see in my mirror Mitsou laughing for joy. Perhaps it will be a Mitsou in tears. But whichever it is it won't be the same Mitsou as before you came, that stupid sensible Mitsou, who never laughed and never cried, that poor creature who didn't even have her own private sorrows. So I am your debtor for life, dear, dear Blue Lieutenant, because you couldn't help giving something to a girl who had nothing.

Your
Mitsou

V.

MITSOU'S flat. She is waiting for him. He ought to arrive in Paris at noon, but he has a family. He has promised Mitsou to come to tea, and she is waiting for him. Yesterday she bought an English teatable, some port, three lace aprons for the maid, 125 francs' worth of perfume, and a hat; and stood around for two hours for the "final fittings" of two frocks. This morning she bought fruit and flowers.

It is five o'clock. The scent is in the hairdressers' bottles and shines, with the colours of brandy and green chartreuse; cherry brandy, port and cognac are on the table and look like the golden toilet water and the liquid carmine that Mitsou uses to touch up her gums and the inside of her lips. The flowers are feeling the heat. The sun is moving slowly; it lights up the bowl of cherries, throws a circle of gold on the table and finally touches Mitsou's shoulder, in the armchair where she has been sitting for some time.

MITSOU (*getting up suddenly*): It's five o'clock! (*The sound of her voice alarms her, she repeats more quietly*) It's five o'clock.

She opens a picture-paper and puts it down again because she sees her hands are trembling. She tries to walk up and down, but there is no up-and-down in this boudoir, and she takes refuge by the window,

against the lace curtain, knowing she has found the place that she won't move from, not until she hears the wheels of a vehicle, the sound of a horn and the banging of a taxi door, the ringing of a doorbell.

She is wearing a black satin dress, with emerald green embroidery at the neck and with short sleeves that stop, as Fluff says, where your arms get skinny. Mitsou is not very pretty today. All the same, her pale face with no make-up, her long heavy lashes, her smooth hair (black satin too) and the unfashionable but distinguished length of her swan-neck give her the solemnness and black-and-white charm of a heroine of romance—though no heroine of romance would have so short a nose.

She is thirsty and bites her dry lips. She leans her forehead against the half-open window, enjoys the faint draught and thinks that a thousand tumultuous thoughts are running through her brain. In fact she isn't thinking about anything; she is just waiting. She stares into the street and sometimes looks down at her shoes, which have wooden heels. Now and again a small worry runs through the anxious emptiness of her mind, stings, and vanishes: "I think a thread has gone in my stocking. . . . I ought to have taken an aspirin. . . . Suppose he isn't free for dinner? . . . Suppose I meet Pierre in the restaurant? . . . And if he wants to come home with me tonight what shall I say? . . . I ought to have taken the black hat and not the black

and green. . . . It's half-past five. . . . Perhaps he has been prevented from coming."

Suddenly the taxi has come. Mitsou just has time to hear a voice ordering the taximan to "take three francs". Two doors open, and shut. Now here he is in front of her—and he doesn't recognize her. He has pictured her a hundred times—against a sky ripped by gun fire, against a moonless night, in a chequered dream—as a Mitsou in town clothes or in pyjamas, or in a dressing-gown. But in fact he has only seen her once, rather imperfectly clothed in tulle and red stockings. He is surprised and a little embarrassed; he had expected to arrive and cry "Mitsou!" and throw his arms round some ruffled tulle and almost bare flesh. However, he finds her pretty and rather touching, a young woman in black, rather pale, holding out her hand to him.

But Mitsou has recognized him, every inch of him. There is no surprise or disappointment for her. She is smiling, simply out of pleasure because her blue lieutenant's hair isn't as black as she thought—much more dark brown, really, with a touch of auburn at the neck. And she says at once just what she ought to: *MITSOU*: How handsome you are!

He smiles and kisses the small hand held out to him. He is blushing and hasn't the courage to kiss the pale cheek, downy with a faint dust of powder. Anyway, Mitsou did not expect to be kissed. She sits down,

motions him to a chair, and starts conversation.

MITSOU: Did you have a good journey?

BLUE LIEUTENANT: A very good one, thank you. Of course it was very slow. (*A pause.*)

MITSOU: Would you care for a glass of port?

BLUE LIEUTENANT: If you will drink too—yes, please.

MITSOU (*filling two glasses*): Cigarettes are next to you.

BLUE LIEUTENANT: If you will smoke too, yes, please.

She lights a cigarette and blows out the smoke with a great puff. He drinks. She drinks. She puts down her glass with a trembling hand and smashes the stem.

MITSOU (*crying out as if the ceiling had fallen down*): Oh!

BLUE LIEUTENANT (*getting up*): At last! I was waiting for that! (*He seizes Mitsou in his arms and starts kissing her blindly.*)

MITSOU (*as soon as he lets her go*): It's plain glass.

BLUE LIEUTENANT: Now what on earth—

MITSOU (*breathing rather fast*): It means luck. (*She cuddles back into his arms.*) Kiss me again, please.

While you're kissing me, at least I'm not frightened of you.

BLUE LIEUTENANT: Of course. I'm only doing it to reassure you.

He continues to reassure her. Her cold hands grow warm and unclench, the thin little body he holds softens and seems almost lifeless. Mitsou shuts her eyes, but the lieutenant looks at her and sees long eye lids edged with black eyelashes, then a forehead from

which the hair has fallen back, and beyond it the mantelpiece with bric-à-brac on it.

BLUE LIEUTENANT (*under his breath*): If I have a minute alone, there's a statuette here I'll smash myself.

MITSOU (*out of breath*): Ah! (*very quietly, and very cautiously*): Robert. . . .

He is as pleased as if he had been given a present. She has never called him Robert before.

ROBERT (*quietly*): Yes, Mitsou; it's me.

Whispering makes them more comfortable. They aren't yet used to the tones of each other's voice.

MITSOU: Well, here you are.

ROBERT:

MITSOU: Will you have dinner with me?

ROBERT:

MITSOU: But not here.

ROBERT (*brought back to earth*): But why not here?

MITSOU (*embarrassed*): Well, you see . . . (*He frowns slightly, for no special reason, and she begins to lie at once*) you see the food isn't good enough for you here, we eat just what comes.

ROBERT (*shocked*): Mitsou! Aren't you gourmet?

MITSOU: Oh, yes, I am, really. But you can't get cakes anywhere.

ROBERT: Cakes aren't the only thing. What are we going to eat tonight? Come and sit on my knees and give your order. Curried lobster? Chicken and mushrooms?

MITSOU (*pouting*): No. What I want is cold salmon with an awful lot of mayonnaise. And then perhaps some sweetbreads. It doesn't matter. What is a nuisance is that we must dine early, because of the revue.

ROBERT: Is it still the same revue?

MITSOU: No, it's a new one since Friday.

ROBERT: Have you got good parts?

MITSOU: I should say so! I do the "Harem Dance", and "Liberty Shining through the World", without tights, and "A Girl of the Sixteenth".

ROBERT: Sixteenth century?

MITSOU: No, the sixteenth ward, the one which is next to the American camp at Auteuil, and you can guess how she earns her living.

ROBERT (*pensively*): Life is getting very odd. •

A silence. He forgets to kiss Mitsou and starts looking round him. The clinical dressing-table fascinates him; he would like to ask Mitsou sympathetically: "How did you get that thing planted on you?" for he doesn't like to think she is responsible.

MITSOU: It's striking, isn't it?

ROBERT: What is, Mitsou?

MITSOU: My dressing-table. It was a very young artist who designed it; he just made that one only, and then he died.

ROBERT: Too late.

MITSOU: No, you don't understand. He died rather young, about thirty, I think.

ROBERT: Yes, I really should have said: Not soon enough.

MITSOU (*all innocence*): No, I'm trying to explain to you . . .

ROBERT: Darling, don't explain anything.

MITSOU (*with a rush of joy*): Oh, I do love to have you in my own place. It is *really* my own place! Have you noticed my glass cabinet? And the armchair in silk? Bounce on the springs, do! And look at the etchings! They're really old. Guaranteed. Have you seen them?

ROBERT (*to himself, in a very gentle tone*): Yes. I've seen them. There's no question. Every one will have to be burnt.

MITSOU: Burnt?

She looks at him, and he stops. She has a way of disarming sarcasm; when she doesn't understand she falls silent and opens her big patient eyes, until the tips of her eyelashes touch her eyebrows.

ROBERT (*touched*): Dear Mitsou!

He holds her close to him and for the minute thinks that she really is dear to him, for he had very nearly wounded her.

MITSOU (*relaxed*): Well . . . what are we going to do?

He was not expecting that question. However, he lets his hands slip down from Mitsou's shoulders along her arms, then down her thighs, pressing her obedient young body so firmly that they do *not* seem to be

just 'caressing her, but moulding her, creating 'her.

MITSOU: No, no, no. I mean—that is, I only meant—
it's getting late.

ROBERT: Then I shall dine with you, Mitsou. if you
will do me that honour.

MITSOU (*seriously, and meaning it*): The honour is for me.

He drops his eyes and blushes a little under his tan,
as he does always when Mitsou 'so easily outdoes his
expectations.

ROBERT: I shall take you to your theatre, which is a
music-hall. . . .

MITSOU (*anxiously*): Yes?

ROBERT: And afterwards. . . . (*She says nothing.*) And
afterwards I shall deliver you at your front door.
(*Mitsou's eyes become suddenly bright with tears, and he
continues hastily, with a slightly sadistic compassion.*)
At your front door, and then I shall say to you
very confidentially: 'Mitsou, my mother's old
butler sleeps very very soundly, and I stand a
fair chance of spending the night on the doorstep,
unless——'

He stops. Neither of them feel like smiling, and
Mitsou does not lower her eyes. Her expression is so
little that of a woman, especially that of a woman in
love, it has so much decision, so much fatalism, so
little hope in it, that pity and once again a sort of
respect strike the young man's virgin heart. He comes
up to the level of her simpleness.

ROBERT: Mitsou, will you have me?

MITSOU: Oh, yes, with the greatest of pleasure.

Her awed young voice gives life to the tired cliché, and he notices that the phrase tactfully makes no reference to love.

RESTAURANT LAVOIE. As it is only a quarter-past seven and several tables are still unoccupied, Mitsou and her lieutenant have secured a corner table in the best part of the restaurant (the left side) and even a certain amount of deference from the commissionaire and a waiter. It is still broad daylight and the rather airless room smells of melon and strawberries. Robert is looking delightedly at the heavy golden dust of the evening, which makes the sky behind the Madeleine a delicate green.

A PAGE (*twelve years old, and with the gravity of his years*):

Bread coupons, please

ROBERT: Never mind, Mitsou; I've got some.

MITSOU: So've I. I get extra as a nightworker.—Don't give him more than two; that's all we need.

ROBERT: But I'm hungry, Mitsou. Here you are, young man. (*The severe child goes away.*)

MITSOU: Are you all right there? Wouldn't you like my corner seat?

ROBERT: I'm very much all right here, Mitsou.

He looks around, with the slightly false aplomb of a man of the world of twenty-four. He puts on an expression of bad temper, to warn all the other guests not to stare at Mitsou, and also to indicate that he himself is quite accustomed to her, in fact hardly interested.

Having given this warning to two depressed Deputies, two ladies from the American Red Cross and a party of four bronzed and garrulous senior officers, he decides to turn his own eyes on Mitsou and enjoy the sight of her in a restaurant—Mitsou in a black hat with an emerald green coronet on it, Mitsou in a black satin cape falling from her shoulders and showing off her long, white, victim-like neck. Mitsou has suddenly become very pretty again.

ROBERT: Black does suit you, Mitsou.

At the same time he is asking himself a question: "Now, why is Mitsou, who is not made up, whose hair is not permed and is brushed away from her ears, who doesn't gesticulate, and hasn't raised her voice—why doesn't Mitsou look like what we call a lady?" This question is so difficult that he doesn't notice the head waiter who is standing next to him. The man's face is like an overfed Roman emperor's and you can read his thought; it is: "My time is precious. I will waste it without a thought, for the sake of my country. I will suffer in silence."

MITSOU (*flattered at Robert's attention*): Robert!

ROBERT: Oh! Yes, I'm sorry. Mitsou, wouldn't you like some lobster? I haven't had any for four months. *Homard à l'indienne?*

MITSOU: Oh, yes. With a lot of mayonnaise and both claws.

THE HEAD WAITER (*looking beyond the uttermost edge of*

this world of sorrows): *Homard à l'indienne* is not served with mayonnaise. It is served with saffron rice and curry.

MITSOU: Oh, I don't mind. Serve me the mayonnaise separately.

ROBERT: Put down mayonnaise. Chicken with mushrooms—oh, good; they've got some. Mitsou, do you like chicken?

MITSOU: Oh, yes, indeed; as long as there's salad with it.

THE HEAD WAITER: The chicken with mushrooms is not served with a salad; there is a cream sauce with——

MITSOU: It doesn't matter. You can serve me a salad separately.

THE HEAD WAITER (*reciting*): Strawberries, raspberries, cherries in ice, bananas, fruit salad.

MITSOU (*gleefully*): Cherries in ice! Cherries in ice!

ROBERT: But they're not nice, Mitsou! They haven't any taste at all.

MITSOU: That's just it; they're fun.

ROBERT: Cherries for Madame and for me (*greedily*) wild strawberries with thick cream. Send me the wine waiter. Mitsou, shall we have burgundy, claret or champagne?

MITSOU: It's all the same to me; I don't care what countries wine comes from.

ROBERT: I think they've got a very attractive claret

here; it has a light bouquet of coffee and of violets in the glass.

MITSOU (*horrified*): How dreadful! Fancy a 'thing like that here!

ROBERT: I'm not suggesting burgundy, which wouldn't go with lobster, and is too full for the chicken——

MITSOU: Does burgundy sparkle?

ROBERT. People sometimes make it do so. But there. I can see we shall end up having champagne.

MITSOU: Oo, yes! A champagne that doesn't taste! (*The wine waiter is present and visible, but he has long lost any interest in the conversation.*)

ROBERT (*shocked*): That doesn't taste! Mitsou, where on earth were you brought up?

MITSOU (*annoyed, because of the wine waiter*): Not in a wineshop, anyway.

ROBERT (*to the wine waiter*): A bottle of ——, *brut*. Mineral water, Mitsou?

MITSOU: Yes, please! A fizzy one.

They are waiting for the lobster. The empty tables are filling up; the American element is in the majority. Fair officers, with red apple cheeks, are admiring Mitsou inordinately—that is, they put down their glasses half full and look at her with their mouths dropping, and forget their drink. Robert frowns to hide his proprietary pleasure. Mitsou compares him to them all and thinks, "He's much handsomer". She is not wholly wrong; her lover is a delicate and brown

type, with thin hands and little bones which move under a fine skin; his moustache, untrimmed, hides a short upper lip, that faintly pulls on his nose as he talks. His eyes are "awfully big for a man", Mitsou decides, and are sunk rather deeply and mysteriously in their sockets.

They are very young, solemn, and silent. She is contemplating him; he is watching her. They are not drunk; that will come later. And as a matter of fact here is the champagne, before the lobster. Mitsou draws the fizziness into her mouth, blinking; he drinks his glass right off.

MITSOU (*laughing*): It's better than the Army ration, isn't it?

He admits that important truth with just a nod. "There it is," he thinks, "I've found out what Mitsou needs. She's much prettier when she's sad than when she laughs. I ought to tell her sad sentimental stories, but I couldn't possibly. I wonder why. I used to write to her without troubling." He notices that he is not quite sure he wants to be Mitsou's lover tonight. "What a pig I am," he says to himself, just at the moment when the pig in him is weakening, the cheerful, greedy pig.

MITSOU (*to the waiter, who is serving her*): That's enough, thank you.

ROBERT (*protesting?*): But you've only got one small claw.

MITSOU (*elegant*): I may have a second helping. But, you know, I'm not really fond of exotic food.

ROBERT (*laughing despite himself*): Mitsou, I'd bet you've never seen the sea.

MITSOU: Yes, I have then. At Deauville. I was awfully bored.

ROBERT: I don't wonder you were.

MITSOU: It's true, isn't it? I'm so glad you said that. I didn't understand a thing about it.

ROBERT: About what?

MITSOU: About Deauville. Of course I was only two days there and I came just in the car. But I don't understand those sort of places where everyone is outside like that. I can understand you'd go to the casino, or to a tea-room, but not everyone always about as if no one had a home. . . .

ROBERT: Why, Mitsou, the fresh air! The sea! The wild waves of Deauville!

MITSOU (*shaking her head*): No, it doesn't say anything to me. I don't really care for the country. (*Looking at him*) But with you, perhaps! A bamboo hut with you, if you like.

ROBERT (*disarmed and encouraged*): Darling Mitsou! We will go to a bamboo hut. But not in a car—I haven't got a car.

MITSOU: I haven't either.

ROBERT: But I thought—

MITSOU: Oh, that's not mine, the one you saw. It

belongs to Pierre. He has to have one for his business.

ROBERT (*coldly*): I see.

MITSOU (*mildly, but insistently*): He has to do a lot of business—very fortunately.

ROBERT (*on edge*): Isn't there some other subject that you'd like my congratulations upon?

MITSOU (*candid*): Is congratulations the same thing as condolences?

ROBERT (*who is not going to joke*): No, Mitsou; it is not. And furthermore, don't you see that this person is not one that you should talk to me about? Elementary, my dear.

MITSOU (*who has, after all, drunk three glasses of champagne*): Oh, you are so touchy! Tomorrow morning, even if you haven't liked me during the night, I'll have given you anyway something I've never given anyone before.

ROBERT: . . . ?

MITSOU: No, I don't mean what you mean. I just mean—my love. It's not so difficult to understand; I've never been in love really before and now I am. That's all. So you see that person isn't really worth envying and you really haven't any reason to call him elementary.

He kisses her hand, and keeps in his hand her long, sensitive fingers—they are warm, and return his pressure honestly and eagerly, glad to trust themselves to

him. As he does this a weird half-hallucination comes over him; he seems to be reading over and over again the phrase Mitsou has just used, written up on an empty space on the eastern wall of a trench and seen by the light of a torch. "I've never been in love really before and now I am." "I expect she'd have spelled really with a double E. Well, then I love her double Es." A nervous little summons by the hand he is holding brings him back. "God forgive me, I really believe I was forgetting Mitsou was there in front of me."

(*Aloud*): Wine waiter! Another bottle, please.

MITSOU: Another bottle! But you'll be tight! (*She bursts out laughing for no reason at all. Flapping her arms like wings—*) I'm hot, I'm not! Let's go!

ROBERT: Go! And leave the chicken, with its mushrooms, all alone? It'd be frightened. And, look, here it comes!

MITSOU: And, look, here it comes! Why, that's a line from one of my parts in the next revue.

ROBERT: Obviously, it'll be a uniquely original show.

The waiter serves. Mitsou eats but little, and Robert eats less than he hoped. Their conversation becomes feebler than ever; it is no more than some exclamations, some hand squeezings and smiles of false understanding; their shouts of laughter hide the emptiness of what they say. The guests at the next table are very envious of this pair of lovers who are enjoying themselves so much. But the fact is that Robert is near to

despair, in spite of the champagne and the good food. He has held Mitsou's feet and knees between his boots; she submitted happily to the hard pressure of his cavalryman's knees. All the same, he does not desire her, not yet anyway. Indeed, he has no desire at all, except that he wants to go away, to go away—to see nothing in front of him but an empty street in the twilight, or a deserted avenue with young grass growing in it, or even one of those country roads where the verges have been trampled out of existence by lorries and armoured cars. Mitsou has so small a place in his wishes that he is getting hysterical. He starts hunting for excuses for lust and jealousy in the glances which the drunk but respectful Americans are throwing at Mitsou. He calls up pictures of Mitsou half naked and in her red stockings. He reproaches himself and works himself up; and it won't do. Suddenly he stops trying to be amusing or even nice. He notices, without any particular pleasure, that Mitsou when she is animated shines like a jewel, that the wine has not made her flushed, and that the nostrils in her over-small nose are still pale and transparent. He has no emotion while listening vaguely to her bringing out some family traditions as rules of life:

“The leaves of a mallow-plant are the things to cure drunkenness, mother always told me . . . Let a man walk two steps alone and he'll do three silly things was what mother said. . . . Mother

'always taught me that you can't possibly be insulted by anything your inferiors say."

He is dreaming, hiding himself in a melancholy solitude. If he dared, he would throw down his napkin, put a banknote on the table, light a cigarette—and say "Goodbye!" Suddenly he hears with indescribable relief that Mitsou is asking him the time. He cheats, by five minutes.

MITSOU: Oh, dear! Is it that already? Darling, I've got to go to the Empyrée. Oh, it's beastly. And my head's spinning too.

ROBERT: Waiter! The bill, please. (*To the commissionaire*): My coat, please. (*He gets up too quickly.*)

MITSOU (*angel-faced*): Where are you going? Do you want to go round the corner? It's on the first floor.

ROBERT (*choking*): Round the——? Really, Mitsou!

MITSOU: Why not? Don't you ever want to go there?

ROBERT (*to recover himself*): The Queen of Spain has no legs, madam!

MITSOU: First I heard of it. Fancy the Spaniards not minding being ruled by a cripple. . . . Have I got my gloves? Yes, I've got my gloves. Have I got my bag? No, I haven't.

Robert is certainly rather drunk and is electrified by the attraction that Mitsou is securing; he hums the chorus of a popular song. As they walk through the restaurant Mitsou is struggling against dizziness and

assumes a look of elegant disdain, Robert an air of devil-may-care which suits him about as well as a ball dress would.

They come out into the street. The Madeleine is pink in the slow-dying spring twilight. Children of three to five years old are selling evening papers and fading daffodils. Except that the daffodils cost a franc instead of ten centimes it is just like peacetime. Mitsou shivers. Robert stretches and breathes deeply; he has come out into the open.

COMMISSIONAIRE (*to Robert*): Taxi, sir?

MITSOU: And quickly, too.

She hangs on to Robert's arm, while two commissionaires start their usual evening hunt; this consists of shooting down, at either end of the Rue Royale, any flying taxi-birds. They run lightly, hardly earth-bound at all; sometimes one leaps on to a taxi on the wing, hangs on for a moment and drops off it to attack a more hopeful prey. At last a vehicle is captured, scrapes up to the kerb and stops.

ROBERT (*to the driver*): The Empyrée, Montmartre.

DRIVER (*sourly*): Is that all?

ROBERT (*with the cold assurance of a gentleman*): You will go where you are told. Get in, Mitsou.

MITSOU (*to the chauffeur, who is starting to speak*): I should jolly well think it was all. Do you think I could stand your face any longer?

Recognizing a colleague from her accent, the driver

start3 up and says no more. Mitsou leans her head on Robert's shoulder; Robert's arm goes round her slender hips. This is the best minute of all. The fresher air, the speed, the bluish lights of the half-blackened-out gas-lamps, the alcohol running in their veins, for Robert Mitsou's scent, for Mitsou the novelty of a mouth that is kissing her mouth; all these are delicious. This is the first time that Mitsou has tasted, one by one, those smooth lips, that enterprising tongue, and those regular small teeth. There is a small canine tooth which is sharper than the others, the pleasure of its nip is so acute that Mitsou pulls herself away.

MITSOU (*head back and eyes shut*) Oh! I wonder where it was you bit me.

He presses her roughly back against the faded cushions and the quivering taxi hood. He is glad to feel himself at last quite normally exasperated, hurried, and hardly with a thought for this woman that he wants. He does, though, remember her name and says in a low voice

Mitsou!

MITSOU (*weakly*) Yes . . . But how can we? . . . We're nearly there. . . . Do let me go, we're nearly there.

Let me go, let me go, you can see I haven't strength to stop you doing anything you want.

He doesn't hear her, and he doesn't stop; but the taxi pulls up in front of the funereal line of purple lamps which is all now that indicates a place of amusement.

MITSOU (*hesitating*): Aren't you coming?

ROBERT: Where?

MITSOU (*pointing to the stage door*): With me. To wait.

ROBERT (*cross and greedy*): No. You come.

MITSOU (*distressed*): But I can't! Think of my contract.

Shall I give you the key?

ROBERT: What key?

MITSOU: The key of my flat, of course. You can go back there and get into bed and wait for me.

ROBERT (*shocked*): Certainly not.

MITSOU: (*still more upset*): But what will you do?

ROBERT: Walk about. Wait outside here. Go to the pictures.

MITSOU: Why don't you go into the audience and see my act?

ROBERT (*sullenly*): I don't know. I just don't like to watch you from the audience any more.

MITSOU (*annoyed*): Well, it's a pity. I've got such pretty costumes, and a very serious number called "The Ivy on the Battlefield" with a little girdle of ivy leaves and a matching crown.

ROBERT (*with a loud laugh*): Well, that's funny!

MITSOU (*scared*): Robert, what's wrong?

ROBERT: Nothing. I was just thinking of the sort of people who believe that ivy grows on battlefields. Don't be cross, Mitsou dear. In two hours I'll be here with a taxi.

MITSOU (*clumsily*): You needn't. I'll have the car——

ROBERT (*interrupting*): Then give it to the poor, or go home in it all by yourself. I shall be here, and I shall have a taxi.

He lifts his officer's cap, kisses her hand as though she was not holding up her mouth, and watches her as she goes. She runs, pushing her head forward like a shop-girl who is late. She doesn't turn her head, but it is only because she is afraid to see in the dreary light of the bluish lamps the sombre face of a discontented, ungrateful young man, whose mouth is still shining from a last fierce kiss.

MITSOU's flat. She comes in, in front of Robert. He is blinking in the electric light and walks forward in a rather hostile way, cautiously circling round the furniture. Mitsou turns round to look at him. She threw herself so wildly into the taxi he had waiting, the journey seemed so short (some sloppy kisses, some stiff remarks—"Was there a big audience? Not too tired?" "What on earth did you do for those two hours?" and so on) that she hasn't had time to find out if "he's still quarrelling" as she thinks of it, childishly. No, he isn't quarrelling, but he is watchful. He is watching those strange doors, and the chandelier of the Goths - in short the whole room whose luxury just because it is so commonplace reminds him of the provinces, with their lace and scollops and thick carpets. There is the astounding bed waiting for them. A marital bed, whose sheets are a little coarse, whose pillows have blue bows on them, and whose silk counterpane is quilted. A big bed, for sleeping in and for conceiving children in. "If I go anywhere near that bed," Robert thinks, "I'm finished." For he has just noticed that he is falling asleep on his feet.

MITSOU: We can talk comfortably now, dear; there's no one here. Come and let me show you. This is the bathroom; I'll run a bath right away. (*He hears the*

laps run, and smiles a comfortable smile. He has already had one bath this morning; he would have as many more (as you liked): This is the boudoir. That way you go out into the passage and that is the doubleyou. Come here and I'll show you how the light turns on in it.

ROBERT (*with male shyness*): Never mind, Mitsou. I'll find it.

MITSOU: That's what people say, and then in the night you want to get up to weewee and you bang into everything and land up in the kitchen. Now just look, the switch is to the left of the door. Does it annoy you to be shown the doubleyou? Gracious, you are a difficult person. You don't ever mind asking for a drink and then you won't talk about what everyone needs when they've had a drink. Now, this is the sitting-room.

Robert follows her and looks vaguely at the South Sea Islands cushions and the fake Dresden china. He is thinking only about the bed. Those huge fat pillows that you slip your arm underneath to find a cool place. The musical elasticity of the mattress. That white, smooth plain, the sheet. To drop down on it, one leg that way, one leg this, and fall asleep. "Asleep?" he thinks with a start. "It wasn't to sleep that I came here."

Mitsou has brought him back into the bedroom. In her black frock, with her eyes chastely lowered and her

long, patrician neck, she looks as meek as a bride. Robert is not touched by it, but all the same, in black against a lace background, Mitsou is a charming picture, and he smiles.

ROBERT: What are you thinking of, Mitsou?

MITSOU (*raising her eyes, modestly*): I was thinking I would undress in the boudoir. The bath is full; I'll only take ten minutes, then I'll run another one for you and then——

ROBERT (*greedily, looking at the bed*): And then we'll go to bed!

MITSOU (*flattered*): Darling! (*She throws her arms round his neck, kisses him and runs off.*)

Robert, left alone, stands for a moment by the bed "Only my cheek," he says to himself. "Just to put my cheek down on the pillow for a moment while I'm waiting. Don't let's be a damned fool. If I once put my face down on that white linen what Mitsou finds when she comes back will be a wallowing beast in boots, snoring away on the bed." He drops into an armchair and tries to think about Mitsou. He falls at once into the rigid sleep of a soldier, sitting up head erect, face stiff. This petrification covers a series of brief dreams, in which war and boyhood (for him so close together) mingle their memories. Blackening blood in great pools, flashes of fire, a holiday house in the country, a flat bottomed boat on the river in the sun. He is barefooted, a small boy again, scooping the water for

tadpoles with a straw hat, when Mitsou re-appears and wakes him.

MITSOU (*in a peach-coloured wrap, her hair hanging down, very moved, very brave,*) Here I am. I'm ready.

ROBERT (*delighted because she has no pyjamas on*): My darling! That's the phrase for a sacrifice.

He takes her in his arms, and becomes solemn again, because she is naked and because she's trembling.

ROBERT: Mitsou, I apologise for my unsuitable dress.

May I go to the bathroom?

MITSOU (*very solemn too*): Yes. I've filled the bath. I think everything's there.

He goes off. He enjoys thoroughly the hot water, splashing with his feet in the bath, rubbing himself with soap and the bath glove, noting the earnest care with which Mitsou has provided a fresh soap tablet, new towels, bath salts, and scented toilet water. Meanwhile she is getting timidly into bed. She is trembling very slightly and watches the pink ribbon quiver on her silk wrap which she has kept on. She listens respectfully to the muffled noises coming from the bathroom. Suddenly she thinks of an evening last week when Fluff came leaping down the staircase of the Empyrée to keep a date, and was calling out quite shamelessly: "Cheers, girls! There's going to be love-making! There's going to be lovemaking!" (only she didn't use the word "lovemaking"). Mitsou doesn't feel like dancing or like shouting; she ruminates a

minute and then shakes her head: "Yes. But then, for Fluff, it wasn't a love affair." Then she thinks, with a sense of shame, of an earlier time, when she gave herself, with a cold politeness, to the Respectable Man, whose embraces were no use to her. "What a long way that seems! I don't know where I am. I shan't ever know. . . . I am going to seem like an old maid." She sighs. Robert comes in without knocking. He is wearing a bathrobe.

MITSOU (*sitting up straight on her bottom*): But I put pyjamas out for you! On the chair at the foot of the bath.

ROBERT (*completely revived by the bath*): Do you think I'd wear reach-me-downs?

He drops off the bathrobe and stands there naked, certain of getting his effect. But it is pearls before swine, for Mitsou thinks any man "a fine figure" who hasn't got a paunch. She turns away her eyes, which is a great pity, makes herself as small as she can on her side of the bed, and says:

"You'll be sure to catch cold."

With one jump he is on the bed, opens it, dives in and slips his left arm round Mitsou's waist. He pulls her to him and presses her whole body against his. She lets out a small squeal like an animal which has been crushed and then stays dumbly squashed against him, breathing very fast.

ROBERT (*victoriously*): Aha! Aha!

But it would be hard for him to say if his cry of victory is about his capture of Mitsou, or about the sheet. It is caressing all his body with the sweetness of the indescribable surface of hard linen, which he has so often remembered. Close to his own face there is another young face, with big eyes which are very dark in the half light, a fresh round face, with a disorder of hair around it. He is almost touching her nose, a very small nose, which makes kisses so easy. He is breathing a breath that still has a faint scent of toothpaste and of the toilet water with which she rubbed her cheeks. He uses his bare knees to separate two knees which are still protected by silk, and easily settles his leg between two smooth thighs. He can feel they are beautifully rounded, and the flesh is firm and resilient. He is very comfortably placed so. If he had the courage, he would say to this unknown young woman whom he is embracing so intimately: "Look, my dear, shall we stay just like this? Let's go to sleep, if we want to—or talk, but only a little. Or we can cuddle a little, but quite platonically, without any nonsense. We can do more if we feel like it. It's quite possible that desire will wake both of us up, some time during the night. . . . But unfortunately that delicate armistice isn't allowed. Because we each of us are afraid of failing the other I have got to pull up or open out that silky veil, which feels so very nice as a matter of fact. I have got to break up our friendly hug. I have got to bustle and you

have got to hand yourself over. Sure enough we shall be happy afterwards, like children who break a window to get some fresh air. Afterwards they sometimes think the window had its use. Perhaps it was even better than a draught. Oh, well. Let's go!"

He doesn't only think that last phrase; he says it.

ROBERT: Let's go!

MITSOU (*vaguely horrified*): Go where?

ROBERT (*compassionately, for she is really very pretty*): My dear, I am a pest. Let's go away from this stillness, this playing at Paul and Virginie, and to hell with all figlaves!

MITSOU (*who is quite contented, just now, to have no idea what he is talking about*): Yes, of course.

But she closes her eyelids and her fingers stay as chaste as her eyes.

ROBERT (*in a whisper*): Are you asleep, Mitsou?

MITSOU (*the same*): Fast asleep.

She looks under her eyelashes at this pretty, naked faun who is crouching over her. He laughs, because he has seen the black and white of her mischievous eyes; she answers with a nervous sharp laugh herself. The simple lovely gaiety of animals has come close to them; each is near to a friendly biting, rolling and struggling; but each too remembers the need for making love, that unavoidable embrace. "Let's go!"

He puts into it a hearty good will which his youth soon warms into something more; his lovemaking

follows a standard path. Mouth first, yes; certainly the mouth. Now the throat, never forget the throat; it hardly fills his two hands, and is straight enough to deserve the lingering, idolatrous respect he pays it.

MITSOU (*excited, and almost crying*): Oh!

Her exclamation, the drooping curve of her mouth, and the hope that she might really cry, excite the invader more than he intended. He rushes through all the stages which the most elementary rules of love-making prescribe. In one leap, Robert has taken everything that his white victim has to offer; she is spread out underneath him with her hair streaming; she has made no resistance. He takes a moment to savour fully, motionless within, the pleasure of what he has seized. Then the slow rhythm begins, to the tune of an unheard dirge, the dance of two joined bodies which are linked together as if they were healing and closing a wound.

In Mitsou's bedroom, for the first time, there is a magnificent picture thrown upon the lace covered wall at the head of her bed: it is the shadow of the body of a naked rider, broad shouldered and narrow waisted, arched over his mount that you cannot see.

VIII

THREE o'clock in the morning. He is asleep. She wakes up, perhaps because he has moved, perhaps because they forgot to turn the light out. She is a little lost as she awakens, but in a moment she remembers; a young man is next to her, a young man who became her lover about midnight, briefly and almost silently, and then fell sleep next to her, as suddenly as people fall dead.

She is tired but clear-eyed. She only remembers a most unusual pleasure, the pleasure of holding close to her a beautiful young body which smelt sweeter as it grew warmer, like cedar wood when you rub it, and which fitted into hers exactly, as closely as petals in a bud; this way it was nice, and that way it was nicer, and each time he changed it was better. It is that she is grateful for, not for the sharp excitement, which she doesn't value very much.

He is sleeping on his side, with one arm under his head. She feels guilty at staring at him. If he was awake, would he allow her to examine so carefully the veins under his white skin, and the fuzz below his flat nipples, which makes a fleur de lis on his breast? There is a white scar on his shoulder. Two vaccination marks on his upper arm. His ribs show their arched shape through his skin; hasn't he got thinner and

paler in these last few weeks? Where has he been living and what has it been like? His fine hands are very dark, at the end of his white arms; trench digging, steel, fire—which is responsible for hardening them and breaking their nails?

Can Mitsou kiss that open hand without waking its serious sleeping owner? No, she can't; he has moved; he is still moving. He is dreaming. The skin of his forehead, his eyebrows, the quivering corners of his mouth, all his features are suddenly filled with a life which has nothing to do with everyday joy or sorrow. Something outside this world is tormenting this prisoner of a dream. Mitsou is horrified as he struggles and groans; his helpless feet attempt to rug, and he tries in vain to get up. A sort of sob breaks up the agony in his unhappy face just at the moment that Mitsou has decided to call him back from his dreams and save him. He falls back into the serene sleep that has been momentarily disturbed by war, terror, carnage and death.

While her hand is still raised to wake him Mitsou leans over him and watches the last ripples of his dream vanish on her lover's face. A final twitch, a sudden flash of mother-of-pearl under his eyelids, and he is fast asleep again, freed from his anxious spirit. "You would think he had gone away", Mitsou considers. But she doesn't let the faint but unpleasant thought become too clear, the thought that she is

watching her lover leave her on a ship, the ship of sleep.

She doesn't feel sleepy. The bed smells nice. She has never bent over the Respectable Man and watched him sleep. What is he like when he sleeps? She doesn't know. She thinks for a moment of that elegant fifty-year-old in blue pyjamas, her skin creeps, and she puts the picture aside. "It isn't suitable at all." But there's another picture behind it: the Respectable Man sitting in front of her at the lunch table at a quarter to one. "What shall I do?" Three o'clock in the morning; that means she has nine hours still. She turns her head unconsciously towards the window where the night is fading; the instinctive movement of prisoners or caged animals. "What shall I do?" Tell the truth; that was what she first thought of, because she is good, light-hearted, and rather simple even if she is very young. But she is not going to tell this truth without the permission of the man sleeping next to her there; her secret isn't only hers. There is a name that she is not going to tell to the Respectable Man, not out of vanity, nor unkindness, nor even sheer excess of joy; she will only tell because the right time has come to tell it — if it ever does. Mitsou shakes her head and her black ringlets, "No," she says to herself, "I mustn't say anything to Pierre. Until I'm told otherwise, it's more decent to lie about it. Robert is to decide. . . . If he doesn't decide anything, well——" She looks at him rather frightenedly. He is now in the land of the

deepest sleep there is, where no dreams come, and he is as handsome as an embalmed body. "Is that man to be my life?" Mitsou prays. "Oh, if only he was willing. . . ." Immediately she rises to the heights of completely mundane heroism. "If only he was willing, I wouldn't need all these things I've got here. I'd just take one room somewhere. I'm earning seven hundred francs a month—eight hundred in the next revue. I'd sell my big diamond ring. I'd take cinema work like I did two years ago; he could come and fetch me after the theatre, when the war's over." She smiles, a swift ghost of a smile. "No. He wouldn't come. He wouldn't wait in my dressing-room. He wouldn't gossip with Fluff and Alice Weiss while I was on stage. He is too proud. He's difficult. He's not at all ordinary."

The sparrows are beginning to twitter, and Mitsou is tired of thinking. She yawns with cold and hunger; the discomfort of the morning is coming over her. She hasn't the energy to go and get the bananas, under-ripe cherries and dry biscuits four steps away. She tells herself she is utterly miserable and has no hope of ever going to sleep again; as she repeats this she lies back and fits herself against Robert's unmoving back, her knees in the crook of his half folded legs, and falls fast asleep again.

Five o'clock. The sky that shows in the crack between the curtains is turning from blue to pink. Someone knocks against a piece of furniture in the house, or

shuts a door, and Robert suddenly answers it: "Yes?" He sits straight up. He looks quickly round the room, and then at the black head of the small wild animal hidden in the white pillow—Mitsou asleep. He wakes up like the twenty-year-old soldier he is—cheerful, rested, aggressive, prepared to leap up and run to the sun. But Mitsou stays asleep. "Poor child. She has slept peacefully right through the night. And I . . . I didn't disturb her." He starts to take her in his arms, and then changes his mind. He waits to comb his hair with his fingers and to rub his eyes; he drinks a little of the tepid mineral water at the bedside table. He rebukes himself for having slept "like a hu band", and leans over to her. Mitsou has vaguely noticed some movement round her, and moves away her arms that were protecting her face. She is pale; the two crescents of her eyelashes reflect the crescents of her eyebrows, as the span of a bridge is repeated by another span in the water of the river. Her mouth is tightly closed, small and sad.

"How pretty she is," he notices. "And what a pity . . ." He is almost thinking aloud, and has startled himself. "What a pity what? Well . . . this is what. A pity that when I saw her I stopped being in love with Mitsou. In a minute or two I am going to prove to her that she is beautiful and I am young and vigorous. And that will have no importance. No importance at all. All the same, I am sorry that it won't. There is a

trouble between me and Mitsou, something very inconvenient that is bothering me. It's perfectly all right that she should expect me to be unique, but I chose to want her too to be unusual. And it's so happened that she is. She's not like Germaine at Christmas or Lily in March, and not at all like—Good God, I'm forgetting already—like Cri-cri in September of last year ”

He picks over a few quite agreeable memories and each time he comments loyally: “But Mitsou is better. Mitsou is better and all the same no affaire has ever left me so discontented. She's more affectionate than skilful in bed? That doesn't really matter. She's silly? No, she isn't. You're not silly if your sensibility is so good, and if your instinct tells you what you can't think out. Her real fault is . . .”

He lifts off a tiny curl which has fallen across Mitsou's check, and tries to get his case against her quite clear. “Her real fault is only this: she makes you have to think about her just when you want to say, ‘You are only a little anxiety, you aren't big enough to be a real nuisance.’ ”

A ray of sunlight is reflected from a window across the street and makes a dancing square of light on the back of the window curtains; the young man is seized by a sort of animal impatience, an indistinct irritation, and a very distinct impulse to go away. “I could go away very easily,” he thinks, looking at Mitsou, who is still asleep and is growing less pale as the light gets

brighter. "There's nothing to stop me. Not here, she will let me go without any arguments or coquetry. She'll give me my freedom all right. But just at the moment I turn her off, there'll be a silent appeal, the camouflage of a very proud beggar: 'I don't want anything, I never asked you for anything, did I?'"

He realizes that whatever he does he looks like falling below Mitsou's level; he shrugs his shoulders and thinks, rather brutally, "Anyway, it's very pleasant."

The sight of Mitsou who hasn't moved brings back his natural kindness. "She is pretty," he repeats. "When she wakes up she'll say something silly. But Cri-cri in September poured out nonsense first thing in the morning, and so did Lily in March; and I forgave them at once. Or perhaps she will knock me out with one of her sentimental platitudes, as vast as the world and as stale. They upset me."

The strange room is getting lighter; he looks round it venomously.

"That statuette in soapy marble, the bowl hanging by chains from the ceiling, the Cupids pouring lace curtains down on to my head: I never expected anything like them. What did I expect to find, then? Well, a woman who wasn't Cri-cri or Lily. Or Mitsou. I'm twisting things. I'm exaggerating her negative virtues. I ought to say quite coarsely: 'She didn't amuse me; she didn't affect me enough to make me cry. The

motion of her narrow hips wasn't enough to give me that violent pleasure that sends you wild. Or exhausts you.' Then if that's so, all I have to do is to go away, and add to Lily of some earlier month another entry. 'Mitsou in May.' No, it's not true. Something in this girl is asking for what I can't and needn't give her, because I'm young and a soldier. She seems to be wanting, passionately, for me to help her to be like the woman I shall love some day. She has a sort of resemblance to her already. What has happened is that a plough has turned up, much too soon, a sod where there was the live seed, or rather the helpless and unformed larva, of the love of my future life. But I am not going to drag my future love out of its eggshell, not yet. It's not my fault that I've been living for three years the sort of life where any action—or any refusal to act—is forced to have an intense meaning, like a religious problem. It's a kind of life when you are forced to believe in the seriousness of everything, even in the seriousness of not being in love. That's the real reason, Mitsou, why I am in your bed trying to evaluate the importance of our joint mistake, instead of going away friendlily and then sending you postcards from the trenches. I don't think it will kill you, will it, to have had the light let in too soon on to your growing life? It won't. You will be a little upset, but you will crawl back into your egg. I don't think it is for me to bring you out of it. That is almost certainly

reserved for someone much more mature, more patient, more frivolous and more meticulous than I am. And he mustn't be stopped short as I am by the 'civvy' tone of all your words and thoughts. A lot of people know nothing at all about the life of young soldiers—frightened, inspired, sceptical, resigned, greedy but deprived of everything, weighed down by a sour and premature old age, borne up by childish confidence—and they don't know either how that civvy flavour spoils our occasional reappearances for a moment in our old life in our homes and towns, and with our women.

"Anyway, Mitsou my dear, you have made me think about the woman I'll love some day. I think she will have your sweetness, and a sort of pride like yours that will make her able to bear disappointments. I hope that as a dividend she'll also have a big heart behind similar small breasts, rather low-slung. I like to think, already, that she and I will speak the same language and we shan't be the least surprised when we meet each other."

He listens to his own thoughts, a little saddened at the sort of loneliness that is going to be his life until he finds the final edition of a Mitsou. In the streets a water hose crashes a jet of water on to the pavement. Empty milk churns are making a noise like Swiss cow-bells. The naked young man makes up his mind, with his favourite word: "Let's go!" He leans over Mitsou,

who is still asleep. "Goodbye, my darling", he says very softly before he wakes her. Then he does wake her, by pulling her close to him, kissing her, and saying in a loud, cheerful voice:

"Good morning, Mitsou!"

THE same day, three o'clock in the afternoon. Mitsou has had lunch with the Respectable Man, and the Respectable Man noticed no change in her. She has learned how to keep a secret, and how to tell suitable lies, and how to keep her mouth shut to avoid lying; she is offering up these wretched concessions to convention as a sacrifice to her favourite love. The Respectable Man has just gone and has left with Mitsou the reassuring promise that he won't come to see her again until the same time tomorrow. Left to herself, Mitsou very nearly gave way for the first time in her life to a violent excitement, violent enough to make her smash a vase deliberately, jump with both feet on the silk seat of the armchair, throw cushions at the ceiling, or just make silly squalling noises. The Respectable Man has gone half an hour earlier than usual, and she has thirty minutes extra to get her face, her hair and her little body ready: Robert is going to call for her at five and they are going to drive in a taxi to the Bois de Boulogne, right to the empty avenues of Auteuil. When Robert left her she was tired, and a little disappointed because he wouldn't wait till the maid came and brought breakfast. But their kiss as he left had been a long one, and more loving than she had hoped for.

"When he said 'You're adorable' as he went," Mitsou said to herself, "I almost thought he was going to say 'I love you.' " The memory is too delicious for her even to smile at it, and so her seriousness is not even shaken when the bell rings, and she says to herself, with a certainty so absolute that for the minute it is almost a comfort: "That's a letter. He isn't coming."

THE MAID (*coming in*): A letter brought by hand, ma'am.

MITSOU (*in a small voice*): Are they waiting for an answer?

THE MAID: No, ma'am. It was a soldier, a private. He didn't stay.

MITSOU: All right. Thank you.

She doesn't open the letter at once. She has to rest for a minute, because she has felt a sudden, wholly physical faintness, the kind that comes over you after a violent nose-bleeding or a slight heart-attack. "How very odd," she thinks, "it's like my heart turning pale." Then she sits down by the window, opens the letter, and reads it:

"Mitsou, my dear,—The captain with whom I came on this special service has to go back tonight."

Mitsou stops and draws a long breath after that sentence. She says to herself: "I understand. It isn't as though he was cross with me, or had something at the back of his mind." She even smiles, so as to prove to herself that everything is all right, and, damn it all, "there's a war on".

"Mitsou, my dear,—The captain with whom I came

In this special service has to go back tonight. Needless to say, dear Mitsou, I have to go too. His legs are covered in serge and leather; it is like an over-filled valise—not the sort of thighs I hoped to have next to mine tonight. I am rather afraid, my warm and smooth darling, to tell you just how much and in what way I am missing you. (Look, I have thoughtlessly gone back to calling you *vous* as we did in our letters, even though this morning we called each other *tu* with all our heart, and all our body too.) I should tell it you badly, and I don't really want to tell you. Remember it was only a little while ago you called me your 'twin', as if I was a classmate and a rival. Your infatuated rival then, darling, is not going to tell you what he misses most in leaving you, or what he misses least. It would swell your head, and also prick your little-girl vanity.

"The best thing for you to do when you've read this letter, Mitsou, is to sit down at that old pink desk which I saw in your boudoir and write me a letter. That way, I shan't have to wait too long for your first letter at the front. Tell me quite brutally if you are sulking over our lost afternoon, our dinner that has been postponed and our night together that we shall have some other time. Tell me too which you'd have chosen, if you'd been forced to have one or the other—the long drive with me or the short night, which would start so late and end so soon? I hadn't an opportunity, this time, to ask you the questions that can't be ignored

or evaded, when two mouths are close together, and the whole of one body is cross-examining another. I've not ravished a single one of your secrets. I'm still under the pleasant slack influence of my old habit of waiting a long time—it was always four days—for one of your veils to fall and one of your phrases to come through. Our conversation was made so slow by the past that I began to associate you with an idea of languidness and indifference. I lost that delusion last night, in your arms. There could be no mistake; you had your own rhythm and it drove me on, saying 'quicker, quicker still'.

"I don't know when I'll come back. I don't know if I'll come back at all. Don't be upset, my dear; I only mean by that that the roads are dreadful and a car accident may break my leg, and that bad drinking water has given several men in my regiment dysentery. The other thing, what you call 'danger', we just don't talk about, that's all. The chief point is: You've got to write to me, Mitsou. Perhaps it is cynical of me, but I must admit to you I want to compare two Mitsous that I know and have pressed against my breast: Mitsou on paper and Mitsou on a bed. Here is another admission, equally unwise: Supposing you get tired of me before you see me again, and supposing you go out a few weeks from now with another lieutenant, dressed in blue and in love with Mitsou, as all French lieutenants ought to be and would like to be, I think

I reserve a letter about it. A last letter from Mitso, full of her dangerous simplicity, her unanswerable sincerity, and her arguments which are always based only on the facts.

"I'm joking, Mitso. It's a stupidly correct thing to do at the end of a letter, when you'd really rather complain and curse. I kiss your hands only, my dear; I am putting out of my mind for the minute, like a good boy, the memory of all the rest of your body that was so kind to me.

"Your

"Blue Lieutenant"

Mitso to the Blue Lieutenant

I AM sitting at my little desk. But I didn't sit down at it at once, and I haven't started writing my letter to you without thinking about it, as you told me to. First of all it isn't my nature to, and I couldn't anyway. And next, a person has to have time to read a letter, to read it properly, and laugh and blow her nose, and wipe her eyes and think about it. I told you already. I can't write quickly. And anyway you didn't yourself write your own letter quickly. You took an awful long time about it for an officer who's been called back to duty. Darling, that isn't a reproach; don't bring your eyebrows together over your nose. It isn't a reproach and all the same it is. I'm wondering if I wouldn't

rather you'd written: "Am compelled to go back with the captain. Love and kisses." Like a telegram, you know. Please don't be cross; let me tell you first what isn't all right and the nicer things will come later. Well, there it is, you're going and it's horrid and it's even worse than that. Now why make excuses for yourself over it. I've got the idea that the excuses aren't so much because you're going but because you're leaving me. Now you'll be saying, "There's Mitsou again; how can I go without also leaving her?" Well, of course. It's difficult to explain, but it's not difficult to understand . . . Darling, only get one thing into your head—I love you. Oh, I don't think I'm giving you a nice present in saying that, quite the contrary. You poor boy, I love you; that's more like. And if you choose you can say when you read it, "That's very nice for me, I don't think". A woman who loves you, even a stupid woman like I, becomes an awful nuisance, she knows things and she guesses things. She's like the electric light when you turn it on; one minute there's only a switch and a stupid glass bulb, and the next there's a sort of line of fire that lights everything up.

The nice part for you of this boring thing that is happening to you is this, that now I know you can count on me. Count on me for anything. To wait if you want me to wait, and to guess it if there's something you're ashamed to tell me. Count on me too if the idea comes to you to say to my face "it's all over

between us"; I'll show I know how to behave and you won't need any soft soap or the other thing;

And another thing, if you think I ought to change my job, or get myself more educated, or alter in some way or other, I can do that too, even if it's only to amuse you or to have something to talk to me of.

Does that make you feel a bit more comfortable about me loving you? Oh, I do hope it does. I'm more or less comforted on my side, because there's nothing I don't see, and your letter doesn't hide anything, least of all. Dear blue lieutenant, it isn't at all difficult to see that though you don't know it what you are really trying to do is to jump backwards to before our meeting yesterday. Nobody could say nicer things than you do about the letters we wrote each other before. A person who wasn't well brought up would just have said to me: "I was crazy about you until I met you. So let's wipe out the last twenty-four hours and start again." But the only use of being well brought up is that you can serve out nicely on a plate what other people throw in people's faces.

"There you are," you'll be saying, "there's that Mitsou being cross." Not cross or miserable, dear, and I do really believe I'm more comfortable in my mind than I was this morning. Think, I was asking myself then when I was all by myself "There's nobody who'll tell me what he really thinks of me" and of course I didn't expect to get that information from

you. In your world nobody says "You're a thoroughly nasty woman, Miss". You say: "Madame, I am charmed to be with you. I must just slip out to get some cigarettes; I won't be a minute", and you leave her there for the rest of her life. I am not a thoroughly nasty woman, but I was afraid I mightn't ever see you again, not even in a letter.

As it is, after the first shock, I can see that there isn't much harm done. "Well," I say to myself, "he is writing to me. He remembers who I am, he asks me questions, he wants to know about me." You shall know everything, dear. Ask anything you want to. Which would I have preferred—the daytime drive or the night we were to have together? I haven't any doubt: I'd have chosen the night. My dear, a night together is less embarrassing, it's even less intimate. I shall always feel more or less good enough for you, provided I've got no clothes on and am lying in bed in your arms. The awful thing is that some time one's got to get up, and then I'm frightened of you. All that you looked for in me while we were together and didn't get—I got all that from you. I'm still being surprised at your skin being so nice, and the solemn expression that you have when you're asleep, and the way you sleep without night clothes. I didn't think your feet would be so small. And I thought too that as you were so refined a young man and ate so elegantly in the restaurant and had all sorts of special ways,

I thought that you would go in for a lot of elaboration in making love. But not at all. All you were interested in was in taking me at once, smoothly and thoroughly, and I was delighted. So how can you expect I shouldn't be in love with you?

The difficult thing for you, dear, would be to stop me loving you. What's almost impossible for me, is to get you to love me. I'm saying "almost", because I'm the sort of person who won't believe in the worst sort of disasters, or of good luck. "Mitsou's much too sensible for her age", the girls used to say. If I hadn't been, I wouldn't of thought things out so carefully while you were asleep, last night. While you were sleeping, darling, I gave up all hope of the very best you might have given me. But I was being like a fire brigade, when it tries to save just a little part of a building. You see I am being quite humble, but I'm not begging for anything; please don't think that. If you answer me by saying "Goodbye, Mitsou", it won't kill me. I have a tough little heart, and it can flourish on disappointment. I am rather like Gitanette, you know; they try to comfort her all the time because of a great sorrow and she answers: "What good would it do me not to have a disappointment to brood over? What'd I do with myself?"

Meanwhile even if I am pigheaded I am going on hoping that you won't leave behind just a disappointment. When you found me I was behind the footlights

singing a song which had only three verses, and I didn't have even three ideas in my head. Whatever you liked in me, it was you who planted it there; anyway, whoever did, it struck root all right. Weren't you surprised how I'd grown after only two months? The trouble was that as soon as I actually saw you all my petals curled up. Still, all the same, a woman who's in love does grow fast. She blooms; she finds out how to put on an elegance and a colour that will fool even the smartest people. My dear, I will try to fool you. This is a tremendous ambition, and anyway you never asked me to go for a walk with you that would go on all our lives, dear Blue Lieutenant. But let's begin with the easiest bit first. Please make me a present by sleeping with me again; let me have the surprise of following you so easily to the moment of delight. Let me have the trust and friendliness of your body; perhaps one night, groping and hardly noticed, those two things may bring me myself to you.

Mitsou